All the Wrong Things

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/14452923.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling
Relationship:	Hermione Granger/Draco Malfoy
Characters:	Draco Malfoy, Hermione Granger, Narcissa Black Malfoy, Lucius Malfoy, Blaise Zabini, Pansy Parkinson, Harry Potter
Additional Tags:	Sequel, Angst, Mutual Pining, Occlumency, Romance, Smut, Teenage Draco Malfoy, Death Eaters, Implied/Referenced Rape/Non-con, brief mentions of sexual slavery, Flashbacks, Co-workers, Draco Malfoy is Bad at Feelings
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Rights and Wrongs
Stats:	Published: 2018-04-27 Completed: 2019-04-14 Words: 160,297 Chapters: 24/24

All the Wrong Things

by LovesBitca8

Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Notes

Oh hey. ;) Thanks for following me over.

I've tried to differentiate between what Hermione's voice was in TRTTD, and what Draco's needs to be in this piece, so the tense and the POV is different. If first person is not your thing, no hard feelings. The Auction AU will be done in Hermione's POV and in third person again. So I guess I'll catch you over there. :)

Also, Draco's side of the story may become much darker, and obviously, from the perspective of a teenage boy. So I will try to keep the Archive Warnings updated as they apply.

THIS IS NOT A STAND ALONE PIECE - You need to read "The Right Thing to Do" before "All the Wrong Things"

See the end of the work for more notes

- Translation into Español available: Todo lo Incorrecto by IreneGarza
- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [授权翻译]所有错事 All the Wrong Things by IreneVeris

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Friday, August 27, 1999

They're murmuring again. Trying to keep their voices low so the prisoner can't hear. But the prisoner is fifteen feet away, and they are failing.

I wish they would take me out of the room if they need to discuss. Bring me back to the small room I was in this morning. But, of course, they let me stand in this cage in the middle of them. On display.

I pick a spot four feet in front of me and maintain my gaze. I don't want to look at them and I don't want to fall asleep. I feel a yawn.

"Mr. Malfoy. Your next witness is here. Are you ready to proceed?"

I almost smile. Do I have a choice?

I nod my head, interested to see what "witnesses" I have.

And Harry Fucking Potter walks in. He looks over at me and has the audacity to grimace, like he pities me. What a joke.

They question him about the night Dumbledore died. No one has ever told me that Potter was there the whole time. Something about a cave, and flying back, and then me appearing on the Astronomy Tower.

I know this story already so I close my eyes.

"And then I saw him lower his wand."

My eyes open. Potter is already looking at me, and I hold in a sneer as it would probably not help my case. His eyes are glistening. Is he going to fucking cry?

"I saw Draco Malfoy lower his wand when Albus Dumbledore offered him protection. I believe that he would have taken the offer if the Death Eaters had not entered the Astronomy Tower at that very moment."

"Mr. Potter, the night that Albus Dumbledore was murdered is already on file from the testimony you gave for Severus Snape. We cannot reopen that night."

"And what if I have new information? Information to help the accused."

"You have already told us that Draco Malfoy failed to kill Albus Dumbledore" – I wince – "and we have that in the file."

A redhead. “Do you have more information for us, Mr. Potter?”

I watch as Potter stumbles over his words, trying to find a pathway back to his noble intentions. He starts talking about the night the Snatchers got him. He looks at me once, quickly, and I’m happy to note that I’m already glaring back in confusion.

What could he possibly have to say about that night? I think of his bubbling skin, the scar bulging out, distorting the stupid lines of it. My father bringing me down to look at him. And his disturbing green eyes looking back at me.

Of course it was Harry Potter. Anyone with half a brain would know.

“—And he refused to identify me,” Potter says.

A laugh bursts from my throat. A scoff. I guess that’s one way of looking at it.

Potter turns to look me. And the slight horror on his face is worth it. I smile at him. Like I just caught the Snitch.

“Mr. Potter,” the redhead asks. “I have several questions about Dolores Umbridge, and Mr. Malfoy’s actions under her reign at Hogwarts.”

I sigh. I settle myself in my cage. I lean back against the bars and cross my ankles and my arms, and let them condemn me.

The sound of Potter’s voice blends into the background. And I wait for a shift in the air. After ten minutes or so, I feel him dismissed.

“Mr. Malfoy.” A grey-haired man. “This is your opportunity to comment on the testimony provided. Do you have a comment?”

I lift a brow.

The grey-haired man rubs the bridge of his nose. I’ve exasperated him. Ten points to me.

“Mr. Malfoy, may I remind you that you are facing up to eighty years in Azkaban. If you have a comment or a clarification to make after a witness has testified, you are encouraged to do so if you think it will help your case.”

Nothing will keep me out of Azkaban, you dolts. You’ve already decided. If the testimony of Harry Potter himself won’t help me, they’ll need to dig up Dumbledore.

“Got it.” My voice is scratchy, but the insolence is at least in place. Several purple robes roll their eyes.

“Shall we proceed then, Mr. Malfoy.”

“Go for it.”

A blonde woman sighs, and looks at me with pity. I hate her for it.

The grey-haired man asks the short, portly wizard at the door to bring in the next witness.

Another one? Really? I keep my ankles crossed, my arms folded, and I lean my head back on the bars, closing my eyes.

“State your name.”

“Hermione Jean Granger.”

My eyes snap open. My left foot touches down on the solid ground, uncrossing my ankles in case I fall over.

I look at her. Taupe colored robes, ugly grey shoes. Neutral tones all around. She looks like she’s trying to play the role of Ministry dreg. Which, last I heard, she is.

“Hermione Jean Granger. You are here of your own free will. You have not been summoned in defense of the accused. Is this correct?”

I’m holding my breath. Waiting for her.

“Yes, that is correct.”

She’s gripping the railing of the testimony platform, and she’s looking straight ahead. She launches into a speech – much more rehearsed than Potter’s – about some night last March, and it’s not until too late that I realize it’s that night.

And she still hasn’t looked at me.

As usual.

As always.

I tear my eyes off of her and glance at the purple robes. The blonde woman that pitied me, catches my eye. I turn away and resume my position. Ankles crossed, arms folded. I don’t remember letting my arms drop.

I concentrate on building the walls I haven’t needed for months. I’m rusty. The only Occlumency one needs in Azkaban is to hide thoughts from *oneself.*

The melody of her voice cuts through me and I try not to listen, only hearing snippets of “buying us time” and “choosing not to identify Harry Potter.”

I start from the basics.

A pile of bricks in front of me. Red, and common. I lay a simple line before my feet. A hand tool moves quickly to fill the holes with the sticky paste.

The Wizengamot begins asking her questions. She hasn’t rehearsed this. I’m not listening to her words but to her tones and tempos. It sounds like when Severus used to grill her until she slipped.

A second layer of red bricks on top of the first. And slowly there is a wall forming, building up from nothing. A third layer, mortar squeezing between brick.

“Did you have a relationship with Mr. Malfoy at Hogwarts?”

I grind my teeth together, and concentrate on the nothing I’m feeling.

“We were classmates.”

I build the fourth line of bricks, getting sloppier, hurrying to get to the fifth row, and the sixth.

I picture her in my mind, and suddenly the wall is built up to her navel. She stares at me in my imagination, asking me what I’m doing.

Bricks to her neck.

I hear my mother’s name from her lips and it pauses me. I turn to look at her in real life. She grips the railing and she’s flushed.

“—due to her ‘assistance with the Battle of Hogwarts.’ I believe I have just presented a moment that his assistance was necessary. I think I could give you several other citations and moments where his actions spoke not of a Death Eater, but of a son and a child. I think Mr. Malfoy’s crimes should be expunged and a full pardon given.”

And I laugh when I realize that I am the “Mr. Malfoy” in this case, and Hermione Granger has chosen me to rescue.

A full pardon. Like the house elves. I’m a pet project for her.

She turns to look at me, and her eyes are wide and terrified. And I hear the bricks crumble and crash to the floor.

Terrified. Of me?

Or *for* me. Imagining a life in Azkaban for me. Terrified. And pitying me.

She turns back to the older people in purple, and I watch her as she fights for me. For no reason whatsoever except that she pities me.

“—What qualifies me is that I am human and I see room for forgiveness –“

And she’s forgiven me.

Well, who asked her to.

I watch as the heat rises in her as she talks back, her face pink and her hands squeezing like they want to be around someone’s neck. And she’s magnificent, and it’s bringing forward everything I’ve tried not to remember. She looks exactly as I remembered her. And my bricks are scattered at my feet.

“Draco Malfoy did not kill Albus Dumbledore. He did not kill anyone. So, I do not see why he is being tried in full Wizengamot as if he is a murderer and a staunch supporter of the Dark Lord. Just because his name is Malfoy does not mean you can place the sins of the war on his shoulders.”

There is silence. The Wizengamot is still.

And she thinks she’s got me pegged.

I’ve kept myself from thinking of her for over a year. Cancelled my subscription to the *Prophet* months ago. Kept her in her box, and she had to come storming in here, reinserting herself. I expected to rot away in peace, but she had to ruin my plans.

A familiar burning inside my gut fires up, where I can’t tell if I would like more to kiss her or to kill her. Like a candle’s flame being pushed either direction by the wind.

I feel the Wizengamot shift. They thank her for her testimony.

She turns to look at me, and I know I’m glaring daggers at her. *The Merciful Hermione Granger.* Protector of the downtrodden.

And in a moment, she loses all confidence. She loses the heat and the passion, and she blinks at me like I’ve drained her. I expect her to glare back. Maybe toss a “You’re welcome, Malfoy” in my direction.

But she looks like she regrets glancing at me. Looks terrified.

She steps down off the witness stand, and exits, her ugly grey shoes clicking away.

This is now the last time I’ll see her? Terrified and cautious? And pitying me.

A memory of her smiling, clutching onto Potter and holding hands with Weasley. Tired and happy and victorious after the Final Battle, as I looked on from the Slytherin table with my mother. *That* was what I had.

And now this.

“Mr. Malfoy. Would you like to comment on the testimony provided?”

Something’s off about her. Something doesn’t make sense. And I’m about to head to Azkaban for twenty to eighty years.

“This will be your last opportunity to address the court today. We will ask questions after lunch, and then on Monday we will reconvene to take your closing statements and discuss your verdict.”

Why was she here? What did she want? Was I just a house elf to her?

I hear them call my name one more time, several crotchety women getting antsy.

One thought presses on me, pushes through my throat and down into my chest.

I have to get out.

~*~

Friday, August 27, 1999 - later

It takes an hour to convince them of my value to the Ministry in the ongoing investigations of dark objects and Death Eaters. I suggest a probationary period, for as long as they'd like, but they aren't satisfied. Finally, the redhead suggests that I provide memories as testimony. They *love* that idea.

I struggle to find a way around it as I piece together a list of everything I would never want another soul to see. All the memories that live in a different part of my mind. The memories that skill and training helped me bury.

Finally, they are in agreement. Memories of anything significant in upcoming trials and investigations, three months of probation at the Ministry – working directly with Potter, I assume – and appearances at court dates for any Death Eaters still on trial.

They look at me, waiting for my acceptance. Like it's easy. I'm just about to accept when the redhead says, "And of course, I would like March 30, 1998 included in your provided memories."

A murmuring of "here, here!" and "it will only help you, dear." I click my jaw shut, and think of a fireplace and a scream. I scratch my temple and ask, "Who will have access to these memories?" I imagine Harry Potter snacking on popcorn while he cozies up to his Pensieve with his Weasley bird.

"The Wizengamot."

"*And* the Auror's Office?" I ask.

"The Wizengamot exclusively," the blonde says. She's watching me closely. Seeing right through me.

I nod. I hate this. I consider the twenty years my father received. I'd be thirty-nine then. I remember the plans I made in my first few months of Azkaban, how I dreamed of starting a company possibly, or just escaping to France to run the vineyards.

And then her terrified eyes, pale and stale, like her clothing. Like everything else about her. And I need to find out what happened.

"I accept."

~*~

Thursday, December 7, 1995

Double Potions with the Gryffindors used to be my absolute favorite thing. I loved watching Potter and Weasley fumble their way through the easiest recipes, and when Severus would mock them, or ignore her hand in the air – ah, that was golden.

It's become an impolite torture now.

I dreamt of her last night. It wasn't the first time and it won't be the last, I know, but it makes these double classes unbearable.

Snape watches me closely throughout the lesson, and I do everything in my power to keep my eyes off of her. He calls on me once, and I quickly recover and provide him an answer. It may be wrong. His gaze stays with me as her hand shoots up to ask a question, and I blink – more of a twitch – to keep my eyes on the front of the room.

"Miss Granger."

"But wouldn't the fluxweed mix too rapidly? Shouldn't it be added slowly?"

I feel the muscles in my jaw clench. She's right. And I would give anything to get her back, but I have no idea what potion we're even talking about. And then I think of how I'd like to correct her. With her arms stuck down on the desk, and her skirt pulled up.

I shake my head.

And suddenly I'm imagining her correcting *me*. Teaching me, with her thighs on either side of mine and her hands on my shoulders, bouncing as she tells me the proper way to mix the fluxweed.

"Miss Granger." Snape's voice snaps me back to the present. "I didn't ask for corrections."

I hear Crabbe laugh lightly on my right. And I train my eyes on the chalkboard, shifting in my chair, and ignoring the discomfort in my trousers.

I don't need to look at her to know that her cheeks are pink. And with any luck, she's biting her lip to keep from biting back at him. I don't need to let my eyes drift in her direction to know she is scribbling furiously, handwriting messy and inconsistent. It doesn't matter. She'll go over her notes again later and rewrite them, making them legible and detailed.

I swallow, and begin taking my own notes.

Twenty minutes later, and I guess the class is over.

"Dismissed. Mr. Malfoy, please stay."

I stare down at my potions book, feeling my classmates' eyes as they pack up around me. I sit. Still and patient. A movement from the corner pulls my eyes and *of course* it's her. For no reason, whatsoever.

She looks away as soon as our eyes meet, and continues packing up her things, the second to last person out the door.

“Draco.” He’s used my given name, so I know that whatever Severus has to say, it will be nothing about school. “Why are you distracted?”

I bite my tongue, and look up at him. He looks down his nose at me.

“O.W.L.s coming up,” I say. “Lots of things in my head. And I’m a Prefect now. Lots of responsibilities.”

He examines me. I decide to stay quiet until spoken to.

“I would suggest,” he says, “sorting out these… responsibilities sooner than later, Draco.” His eyes flicker to the door. He waves a hand and it locks. He waves his hand again and I feel the hum of a silencing charm. I let out a slow breath, and he says, “It won’t do to be *distracted.* Times like these call for concentration.”

I blink up at him, and wonder why this moment required a silencing charm. He’s staring directly into my eyes, like I’m supposed to understand something. He doesn’t look like he’s going to say anything more, so I stand, gathering my books.

“Of course, Severus.”

“You are going home for Christmas this year, yes?”

I look up at him, potions book halfway into my bag. “Yes, that’s the plan.”

“I’m sure you’re aware that you may have… visitors at the holidays.” His voice lilts at the end, and now I know why he’s silenced the room. “Possibly even house guests.”

I shiver at the idea of Lord Voldemort slithering through the Manor.

“I’m not sure I was aware, no.” I swallow. “Thank you for telling me.” I stand still, unsure if we are finished.

“You may even have the opportunity to meet a few relatives. On your mother’s side. If not by Christmas, then shortly after, I’m sure.” His eyes are black and diving into mine.

Aunt Bellatrix? But she’s in Azkaban. A breakout?

He’s telling me top secret plans. He’s looking into me, pouring information into my mind and I don’t know what he wants from me.

“That will be a happy reunion, I’m sure,” I try. Maybe he’s testing me.

“I encourage you to concentrate. When meeting new people, Draco.”

Concentrate. “Of course. Thank you, Severus.”

“Your *distractions*... could be very dangerous,” he says. He steps closer to me. “For you, and for Miss Granger.”

Cold seizes my chest. I feel the skin on my face buzzing, tightening. My eyes are open and trained on him.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

He sighs. He drags his eyes across my face, my neck and shoulders, and back up to my eyes.

“That will never work on him, Draco. Or your Aunt. Or even your father –“

“I have no idea what you’re talking about –“

“Are you *in* a relationship with her, or are you just imagining one?”

I step into him, and my face heats. “I. Have. No idea. What. You are talking about.” I clip my words, hissing them into his face. I’m almost as tall as him now.

He frowns, and looks to the side. He moves away from me, back to the front of the room.

I’m seeing red as I shove my quill and ink into my bag.

“You have all the makings of a great Occlumens, Draco. When you are cornered, your mind blanks. You tend towards self-preservation. Most would start thinking of consequences or of their loved ones, but your mind focuses on the task at hand.” His back is to me. “It will be quite easy for you to learn.”

“I don’t need Occlumency,” I hiss. “I have nothing to hide from the Dark Lord.” I throw my bag on my shoulder. “Do you make it a habit of reading your students’ minds?”

“I didn’t have to delve into you at all, Draco. You were screaming it at me,” he says. I snort in response. “You will need to control your emotions and your thoughts. I can help you—“

“I don’t need help. I don’t need you.” I stomp to the door, pulling my wand to unlock it.

“If the Dark Lord finds out –“

I spin. “He won’t find out!” And I feel my breath leave me. I’ve admitted it out loud. He doesn’t look smug about it. He looks devastated. I squeeze my hand around my wand. I try to relax my face, and scoff. “It’s just sex. It’s just fantasy.” I shrug. “I’m fifteen.”

He looks into me. “Then I suggest you find a more… suitable outlet.”

I swallow. He waves his hand and releases his spells on the room. I pull the door open and run.

Chapter End Notes

Find me on Tumblr , Instagram , and Twitter .

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much to everyone who's shown interest and support for this story! The amount of love so far is insane and I can't thank you enough. I know the tense and the POV are throwing some people, but thanks for sticking with me. My response is: Well, you wanted inside his head! lol

Friday, June 5, 1998

It's my favorites for breakfast. Pumpkin pastries, ordered special from someplace where pumpkins are in season. My favorite jams and scones. Eggs, beans, sausages.

And it all tastes like ash.

Father reads the paper, eyes unmoving. Mother stands to pace the room, teacup and saucer in hand. I stare at the pumpkin biscuit on my plate.

The Notts were taken yesterday. And the Goyles. Pansy's father. Pansy was probably taken in for questioning, but I know they won't find any Unforgivables from her wand inspection. She'll be released quickly.

"Why did they wait?" Mother whispers. "Why haven't they taken us yet?"

"To see if we would run," Father replies, and turns the page.

I wish we had. Years back. I wish I'd been sent to Durmstrang like Father wanted.

"Remember," he says, "you may ask for a member of the Wizengamot present while you are questioned." He lifts his teacup. "The Auror's Office must abide by your request. I highly recommend –"

"Thank you, Lucius," Mother says, eyes trained out the window. "But I'm quite done with your 'recommendations.'"

A *crack.*

Hix, one of the grounds elves pops into the room.

“Master Malfoy,” he squeaks, eyes wide. “They are here.”

Father closes his paper. Mother finishes her tea, and grabs up her napkin, pressing the cloth to her lips.

I stare at my breakfast, and wonder if I will ever see this much food again.

Father stands, and we follow him out of the dining room and into the entry hall. We stand in a straight line, facing the front doors. I feel Father turn to me.

“Be strong, Draco. This isn’t forever.”

“You don’t know that,” I say.

“You don’t have to answer any questions until a member of the Wizengamot is available. Remember that,” he says, straightening his sleeves. “If you need me, you will need to write to me—“

“What would I possibly need from *you*,” I hiss at him.

I feel his eyes on me as I keep mine trained on the front doors. My mother clutches my hand as the doors explode open, and about twenty Aurors storm through it. Our wands fly from our pockets – not *my* wand, still my mother’s – and a spell kicks my knees out so I fall on them. I raise my hands in the air, as my parents do the same.

They are yelling things, and I’m trying to follow direction. I see my father dealt with first. Restraints placed on him, and he is taken out. Then my mother. That is harder to watch.

Then it’s my turn, and a young Auror, barely twenty-five, restrains me. I might recognize him from Hogwarts. As he hauls me to my feet, his fist pops into my stomach so quickly I don’t even know what happened. My air disappears and I fold over, seeing lights.

He drags me forward, and tugs my head up to his face, fist in my hair, and sour breath against my nose.

“Happy Birthday, Malfoy.”

~*~

Friday, August 27, 1999 - later

Someone must have informed my mother that I was being released. She was to meet me for lunch before the trial reconvened in the afternoon, but when the guards escort me to a holding area, she is there, grinning like a loon.

She throws her arms around me, and I'm ashamed at my appearance. Greasy and unkempt. She whispers loving words to me and my eyes drift to see Rita Skeeter there too.

"Oh, how handsome you are Draco!" Her eyes dance over me. "But we'll have to clean you up a bit first."

There's a shower down the hall, and my mother gives me soap and shampoo. The ones I would use at home. I'm curious as to how she knew to bring them. The showers in the bowels of the Ministry are nicer than the ones at Azkaban, and I'm finished in five minutes, still unused to the idea of endless time. Time that belongs to me again.

When I return to the room in a fresh set of robes – new robes, bought just for me – I finally ask Rita what she's doing here.

"For the *Prophet*, darling!" Rita takes my elbow and leads me to a side room where a photographer is set up. "We couldn't have you seen leaving the Ministry today with that Azkaban grime on you. No, we'll need to take a few photos here, and a few of you and your mother leaving."

I frown at her. "Are you my press agent?"

She giggles and bats my arm, and I assume that's my answer. She dries my hair with her wand, and I let her set it just so, feeling awkward about having someone's hands on me.

I think my mother has been the only person to touch me in fifteen months. Just hugs on her monthly visits. Or the guards gripping my elbows as they led me around.

Skeeter directs me to stare into the camera and the light blinds me as her photographer jumps around.

After a short lunch, I am brought back to the courtroom, and vials are placed before me. I am handed my wand, and I hardly recognize it. I wonder if it will even still respond to me. Doesn't it belong to Potter now?

As it slides into my hand, it hums, and at least it recognizes me.

I spend the rest of the afternoon digging through my mind and tugging at memories like weeds. I have to label each wisp of silver as it drops into a vial, and discuss the significance of each memory with the Wizengamot. It takes hours.

My mother is waiting for me when I am done. I am taken to Azkaban to clean out my cell, and then I am released into my mother's custody. They take pictures as I leave.

As we're leaving, I think of my father, somewhere in that castle. While my mother has visited me once a month since her release, I've never once been allowed to see my father while I was in Azkaban, and as I leave the fortress behind, I hope I can leave him behind as well.

Mother and I arrive back at home. Just as I left it. Only now it is just Mippy who greets us. And I wonder what I'm supposed to do with all this space. I wonder how Mother can bear it.

We're in the entrance hall, near the fireplaces, and Mother asks me what I'd like to do.

"Sleep, I guess?"

"Are you hungry?"

I'm about to answer her when I see that the doors to the drawing room are pulled closed. She follows my eyes as I swallow.

"I don't much like that room anymore," she says. "Or the dining hall. I take my meals in the east wing now."

I blink, trying to block out the image of Professor Burbage's body hitting the dining table.

"Let's renovate it. Both of them."

She nods at me and smiles. She lets me go to bed. I climb the staircase, almost getting lost along the way. I finally find my bedroom, but only after I pass the room next to it. I move quickly past it, to keep myself from looking inside.

~*~

Monday, December 23, 1991

"And they just let him on the team!" I slap my hands down on the table. "The Hogwarts guidelines say that first years aren't even allowed brooms, but McGonagall just *hands* him one, clearly playing favorites, Father."

"Yes, Draco, you told me in your letters." He sips his morning tea.

"And isn't it strictly against the rules for a first year to be on the team?" I say. "I've been looking into it in the library but I haven't seen it referenced."

"I believe," Mother says, "that first years may try out, but that they may only use school brooms to do so." She pats the corner of her mouth with her napkin.

"How is *that* fair! Father, there must be something you can do about this, truly."

"Don't worry, Draco. You'll be on the team next year, and you'll be able to best Potter without resorting to rule breaking." He flips the *Prophet* pages. "How are your classes? Do you expect good marks?"

"Yes, Father." I pick at my toast. "I'm top in Potions, and very highly ranked in all other classes."

"How highly?" His eyes are now off the paper, looking at me with interest for the first time.

"Second, I believe," I say, lifting a haughty brow like he taught me.

"Excellent, Draco," Mother says.

“And who is in first?” he asks, his mouth twisting.

I narrow my eyes at the table, tugging at the napkin in my lap. I growl, “Hermione Granger.”

“Granger,” Mother says, looking at Father with squinted eyes. “I don’t know the Grangers, do you?”

“Is she related to Hector Dagworth-Granger, the potioneer?” Father asks.

I scoff and say, “Merlin, no. She’s a Mudblood.”

“Draco,” Mother coos. “You can’t use that word at school.”

“Well, I’m not at school, am I?” I glare at her.

“Watch your tone,” Father says. I pout, and stab at the remains of my breakfast. “A Muggle-born girl at the top of her class? Is she a Ravenclaw?”

“Gryffindor,” I sneer. “Best friends with Harry Potter.”

“Ah.” Father shakes his head. “That explains it. Everyone at that bloody school has gone soft for Potter and Dumbledore. I’m sure she’s not actually receiving better marks than you, Draco. They are boosting her scores.”

I look to my mother and she raises a brow at Father, before sipping from her teacup.

“Do you really think so?” I ask, greedy. “That’s unfair! She’s so irritating! She jumps up and down like she has to use the loo every time a professor asks a question. She’s constantly scribbling notes – and her handwriting is just awful – and she tosses completely useless information out at all times, even though you didn’t ask for it.” I pick up my juice glass, but have another thought before I can sip. “*And* she spends all her time in the library at *my* favorite table! Every time I go in there, she’s sitting there, reading *Hogwarts, A History* or some other mundane book, and I’m just so sick of her!”

I cross my arms and frown at my plate. Father turns a page in the newspaper, but Mother is watching me.

“What does Miss Granger look like? Is she of a pretty sort?” she says, bringing the teacup to her lips. I scowl at her and I see Father turn down the pages of his newspaper to eye her.

“No! She’s hideous! She’s got this great mane of ugly brown hair – I’m surprised she can even *see* half the time – and she’s never dressed appropriately. And don’t even get me started on her teeth—!”

“Oh, what a shame for her,” Mother says, straightening the tablecloth. “So, she has no redeeming qualities at all then?” She lifts her eyes to me, and I feel my father shift next to me.

“Not a one!” I scoff.

“Narcissa,” Father says, and it sounds like a warning, but I didn’t hear the cause. “He’s eleven.”

“And?” she says. “I was eleven the first time someone called me a ‘hideous excuse for a Black’ in the Great Hall.”

“Yes, but I was thirteen,” Father says, frowning.

“You scoundrel.” Mother winks at him.

“What are you talking about?” I look between them both. “Mother, you’re prettier than both your sisters combined.”

“Yes, your father knows it now, and he knew it then, too.” Mother flips her hair over her shoulder, smiling at her husband. I’m about to heave in disgust when Father speaks.

“Draco, have you gotten to know Miss Parkinson? Or the Greengrass girl?”

I shrug, picking up my fork again. “Yeah, they’re okay. They’re bloody stupid.”

“What a pity all girls can’t be as bright as Hermione Granger,” Mother says. She sips from her teacup and watches me.

“Yeah, I guess…” I trail off and frown at my eggs.

~*~

Saturday, August 28, 1999

Waking up in my own bed is strange. I can’t sleep on the mattress for the first night – too soft, too many pillows – so I take the covers down to the floor and sleep next to my bed. Mippy finds me there the next morning, causing a huge scene.

I can’t find the stairs for a long time either. Heading down to breakfast with mother in the mornings is mentally taxing.

I spend a bit of time flying. I find old brooms and try flying around for a few hours the first days. My muscles have atrophied in Azkaban.

I’m offending Mippy with my appetite. The little thing is so excited to cook for two that she goes completely mental the first week. She makes five course meals for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Mother is able to take small bits of each and thank the elf, but I can’t eat more than soup and bread. The sweets and the spices make me sick.

Skeeter visits on Monday. My mother sets us up in the library, hovering over the tea cart. She wants to talk about my social life. I laugh. I have none.

“What about Blaise?” Mother says. “Does he know you were released? I could get in contact with his mother?”

“And set up a playdate?” I shoot at her. She glares back at me and turns back to fixing Skeeter’s tea. “He’s in Italy still.”

Skeeter sits forward, almost falling off her seat. “To see you out with old chums from Hogwarts – especially those who were not as heavily involved in the Final Battle as others – will do wonders for you, dear.” She taps her chin. “What about Miss Parkinson?”

I watch my mother’s eyes turn to me, deferring to me. I think of the stack of letters, postcards, pictures that Pansy sent me over the past year. They were thrown out upon leaving my cell, unanswered.

“I’m not sure where Pansy and I stand.”

“Well, all the better to find out then!” Skeeter grins and her quill jots notes behind her head. I frown, and glare at it. “Speaking of beautiful, single women,” Skeeter coos, “when can we see you out on the town!” She takes me in with greedy eyes.

“Out on the town?”

“Courting, dear!” She giggles, and the sound is obnoxious. “You’re… what? Twenty-five?”

“Nineteen.”

“Even better!” Her eyes gleam. “The world wants to know what the Malfoy heir does in his free time! Who he’s seeing, how *many* he’s seeing.” She nods at me, secretively. “*You,* Draco Malfoy, are a commodity. And we need to present you as such to the world.”

“I’m an ex-Death Eater, with no friends and no purpose,” I hiss at her.

“Only if you allow yourself to be.” She winks at me.

The next day Skeeter publishes an article about my calendar. A beautiful schedule created by Skeeter herself, detailing my day-to-day life. I actually try to follow it. Whoever’s schedule this is, he sounds like a very interesting person.

I leave the Manor for the first time that day. I get a haircut. Skeeter’s schedule says I spend time at Florean Fortescue’s for lunch every day, so I decide to pop in to grab a sandwich.

Entering Diagon Alley that day is a big mistake. It is August 31. The last day of supply shopping before the Hogwarts Express leaves on September 1. The streets are overcrowded, the storefronts packed, and I am too recognizable.

My chest seizes and won’t let me breathe as parents pull their children away from me, and Slytherin fourth years try to send me a wave before their friends tug their arms.

I Apparate home. A failed mission.

But at least Skeeter prints on Wednesday that I had been in Diagon Alley, helping the young Slytherins pick up their robes.

When Mother asks me to head back to Diagon Alley that Saturday, I refuse.

“Draco, this book has been on hold for almost a week. I really need to pick it up.”

“Then pick it up. Why do I have go?”

“I have a terrible headache, Draco,” she says, pressing her knuckles to her forehead like some damsel in distress. This should have been my first clue. “Besides, it’s Cornerstone. I know Morty would love to see you.” She turns away, her voice drifting. “Maybe you could spend time there like you used to?”

I roll my eyes and head out on her errand. Diagon Alley is considerably less crowded, but still a weekend bunch, so I have to dodge the casual strollers, and weave through the day-trippers. Seeing Cornerstone again after quite a few years is like breathing fresh air. The store on the corner with the door at an odd angle.

I panic for a moment, wondering what Morty thinks of me, but I realize he still does business with my mother, so he must not feel too strongly about the Malfoy family. Or at least the Malfoys that go by Black.

I pull the door open, relieved to find no crowds. There never were crowds here. It was delightful to people-watch and daydream when I was younger, watching from a perch that Morty let me climb to as classmates wandered in, or hiding from my parents when they came to collect me. Or waiting for her to come in to browse –

I clear my head as I step up the two steps to the counter, trying to rid myself of the memories of watching her choose books.

And like a spell, she emerges from the stacks to the right. I stop, standing on one foot as the other is mid-step. She flutters to the counter, and my eyes widen when she steps behind it, suddenly pulling receipts from a drawer, like she works here. Like she belongs.

“I thought you worked for the Ministry.”

She spins. Her eyes grow wide at the sight of me, and I see her breath catch in her throat.

Terrified. Of me.

I frown. Her eyes wander over me, and I feel warm as she examines me. I raise a brow, waiting for her answer.

“No,” she says. “I mean – I mean yes, I do, but not on the weekends.” She stares at me. “On the weekends I work here.”

Her voice is tight, startled and cautious. Her eyes bright and breathing shallow. I look away before I concentrate on the rise and fall of her chest any longer.

“Obviously,” I try, condescending. “But why?”

She opens her mouth to answer and no sound comes out. Her tongue is pink. Her eyes dance over my face and I want her to scowl at me. I want her to call me a Death Eater and tell me to get out. I want her to be familiar.

Then suddenly: “It’s a bookstore. I like books.”

I feel the air leave me before I can decide if it is a laugh or a sneer or a chuckle. “I remember.” I turn my eyes away from her, trying to dismiss her. “I’m picking up a book.”

She jumps. Like she’s been shocked. “Yes, of course!” The sound is abrupt and it shakes me from whatever trance she has me under. “Did you have it reserved?”

I see her move immediately to the Ms, and I say, “It’s under Black.” She looks at me quickly, and the feeling of shame washes over me, the feeling I associate with *Malfoy.* “It’s my mother’s order.”

I watch her calculate that information. She pulls the book and smiles. She begins speaking, something about goblins, but I watch her teeth, and her lips, and the light in her eyes, and I find myself jealous of the book in her hands, the book she smiles at. I feel dizzy and just before she looks up at me, the ghost of her smile on her cheeks, I remember what I’m missing. A barricade. I throw up a wall, hasty, grey stones. Something I should have had in place from the moment she popped out of the stacks, but she surprised me. Her eyes land on me and I’m hidden behind the stones.

“Your mother has excellent taste in books.”

“I’ll be sure to let her know.” I feel my face relaxing.

She’s handing me the bag and we’re done. The business has concluded. But I want to stay.

“Why Cornerstone?” I take the bag from her.

She opens her mouth again and no sound comes out. And I revel in making her speechless for the second time today.

“I believe it’s because it’s located at the corner of Diagon Alley and Hor—“

“I know why it’s named Cornerstone,” I cut her off. Has she hit her head? “Why are you working here and not Flourish and Blotts? I would have thought you'd love to help the first years pick up their text books and buy their parchment. Host monthly Gilderoy Lockheart fan club meetings."

She’s looking at me with wide eyes like I’ve just said something marvelous, and I can’t for the life of me remember what we’re talking about.

“I suppose I like Cornerstone because it's more out of the way. Less likely to be recognized here." She looks away, blushing. And I can’t even comprehend what it must be like for her now that the war is over and she is a household name. She knows now what it was like for me.

“I used to come here during the summers for the same reasons.” My eyes wander to the perch Morty would let me sit at. Where I could watch her…

“I never saw you here.”

I look back at her, and it almost looks like she would have wanted to.

“That was sort of the point, wasn’t it?”

She nods at me, and I guess that’s goodbye. I take in her face one last time, in case I don’t get another chance, and tilt my head at her.

How idiotic. I should have said goodbye or waved. I shake my head and sigh as I exit, wondering if she’s already disappeared behind the stacks.

I take the south side of Diagon Alley, and I pop into the *Daily Prophet* main office. I ask the woman at the front for a copy of every paper printed since June of last year. Her eyes bulge out of her head, and I tell her to have them delivered to Malfoy Manor, at their earliest convenience.

I get home and I toss the book next to my mother on her couch in the library.

“Did you see Morty?”

“No, he wasn’t there.”

“Oh. Did you run into anyone else interesting?”

I stop on my way out the door, turning to see her lifted brow from this side of her book.

“Hermione Granger works there,” I say, watching her.

“Oh?” She’s still. An excellent tell of hers.

“But, you already knew that.”

She lowers the book and blinks at me. “Did I?”

I shake my head at her and head upstairs. Mippy appears an hour later, carrying *Daily Prophets* from June 1998. I tell her there will be more coming, and she squeaks, disappearing.

I start with June 5, 1998. There is a brief mention of my birthday, but it is eaten by the news of the Nott, Goyle, and Parkinson arrests the day before. I toss it away. There was an evening paper on June 5, detailing the arrest of the Malfoy family earlier that day. I flip through, trying to re-acclimate myself to society. I continue looking through each day until finally on June 12, a picture of the three of them graces the cover. They began their testimonies of their glorified camping trip that day. Within a week my mother was out of prison and I suppose I owe Potter a thank you for that.

I place the June 12 paper to the side. I find another picture of the Golden Trio on the cover of the June 26 *Prophet*. I remember this one. Weasley said he wanted to be a Quidditch star, like the leech that he is, and Potter said he'd work for the Ministry.

She wanted to go back to Hogwarts. Just as I had suspected she would, but it frustrated me just the same. The same thought strikes me as when I read this paper in Azkaban a little over a year ago: How could she go back to that place after everything? Why wouldn't she want to move forward? She didn't need her N.E.W.T.s or her final year. There's not a person in the wizarding world who would have denied her anything.

I toss that paper on top of the other one. I delve through the rest of June, noting things that are now of interest to me, like Cuthbert Mockridge's retirement. A year ago, it was a glance through the pages, looking for any mention of my trial date. I laugh now at how optimistic I was.

I finish with the *Daily Prophets* from June 1998. The ones I set aside, I use a quick severing charm with my wand, and before I can second guess myself, I have cut the articles out.

I go to my closet, to the dresser in the back, and I crouch to open the bottom drawer. I find it just as I left it. A shoe box and extra blankets. I pop the top of the shoe box, and find her face staring at me from the *Prophet* clippings from years ago. On top is Skeeter's piece about her dating Krum and Potter at the same time from fourth year. I don't remember why it was on top. She's hugging Potter in the champion's tent, turning as the camera catches them, eyes wide and scared. Just like last week at my trial.

I place the new clippings from the June papers inside the box, close the top, shut the dresser drawer, and turn off the light in the closet.

Mippy brings in the July papers.

I don't sleep.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone reading this so far! Next chapter may take a few weeks, just a heads up.

Wednesday, January 19, 1994

There's a handy spell Blaise taught me last year. *Oculus Dolus*. It's a trick that makes it seem like your eyes are concentrated on one thing to an observer, but really you can be looking anywhere you want.

Blaise likes to use this to nod off in Transfiguration without letting McGonagall know. He also claims he's used it to convince Daphne Greengrass to go skinny-dipping with him in the lake, telling her "I won't look as you disrobe," but I'm still trying to verify this story with Pansy.

I've found all sorts of uses for it over the past year, the most recent of which is figuring out why Hermione Granger is glaring at me.

I surprise myself by admitting that I've done nothing to deserve this. She's been glaring at me all week, starting in the library on Saturday. I assumed she was upset that I arrived first to take her favorite ta– *my* favorite table.

But then she was glaring in History of Magic two days ago. I pulled out the book I'd checked out of the library, having devoured it over the weekend and now on my second read, and when I saw her icy eyes from across the room, I sent her a sneer. I thought perhaps she was upset that I was ignoring Professor Binns by reading a novel in class – not that it's any of her bloody business – but then yesterday I had it back in the library.

The bint had snatched up our favorite – *my* favorite table – so it couldn't have been about that. But then she glared at me while I minded my own business, re-reading a few pages of this new book I'm quite enjoying.

When I'd seen her eyeing me yesterday, I'd cast *Oculus Dolus*. To her eye, I was reading the book, but actually I spent the afternoon examining her, trying to figure out what her issue was with me.

Besides the normal issues, of course.

I'd turn a page every now and then, and she'd huff.

I'm at the Slytherin table in the Great Hall now, and I'm trying to start the book from the beginning. Pansy is next to me, chattering to Tracey Davis, and I can feel her bloody eyes on me again.

Oculus Dolus.

She's glaring across the whole Great Hall, and I'm surprised to see Potter and Weasel aren't with her. Finnigan asks her a question and then she turns back to glare at me.

I try to concentrate on this story again. I re-read the part where the Evil Queen transfigures her stepson into a dog. It makes me laugh again.

"What are you reading, Draco?" Pansy coos. She drapes herself across my arm and I shake her off.

"It's a book. Ever heard of one?"

Pansy frowns at me, and I stand, grabbing my things and heading out into the Entrance Hall. Out of the corner of my eye I see her, standing to follow.

She's on my last nerve and I turn to hide behind a statue as she pops through the doors, looking in the direction of the Slytherin dorms.

I pull my wand and step out. "Why are you watching me, Granger?"

She spins around and her eyes land on the book under my arm.

"Are you done with that book?" She places her hands on her hips in that annoying way.

I look down at the book. "What?"

"You really shouldn't read books that aren't even yours at the dining table. If you spilled even the smallest drop of coffee on the pages, Madam Pince wouldn't let you hear the end of it." She looks away. "Trust me."

What nonsense is this?

"Well, it's a good thing I don't drink coffee," I say. I dismiss her, walking away.

"Are you done with it or not?" She calls after me.

Merlin, can she keep it down? I'd hate for anyone to think we're having an actual conversation.

"What's it to you, Mudblood?" I smile and continue walking. I'm confused that I don't hear an indignant gasp, or a wail of self-pity. I did say "Mudblood," didn't I?

"You're only allowed to check a book out for a maximum of two weeks!"

I turn and snap at her. "Then you can get it in two weeks!" I smile. "Unless I check it back out again!"

She huffs and marches back to the Great Hall.

Merlin, I hate her!

I look down at the green and gold book in my hands. All of this was over a damn book? She's lost *hours* of her time by glaring at me for the past week because I had this book?

I flip open the cover and look at the library checkout page. I find her name six times. *Six times!*

Leave it to Granger to get riled up about a bloody book.

~*~

Tuesday, September 7, 1999

Katya Viktor was a scrap of a thing the last time I visited Bulgaria.

Of course, I was nine, so I was also quite unimpressive. She was twelve and ignored me completely as our fathers toasted each other's accomplishments.

Over the years, I've seen her modeling Quidditch equipment that I knew she didn't use, playing hostess for Bulgarian Ministers she wasn't old enough to vote for, and wearing diamond necklaces in Witch Weekly that she was paid to wear.

When she walks into the pub, hair swishing behind her and heads turning to follow her, it's difficult to remember that twelve-year-old stick at all.

Her eyes land on me and she smiles.

"Draco!" She pulls me close and she kisses my cheek. I don't remember the last time a girl's lips touched my skin. "You look well!"

And I know she means "—for someone just released from Azkaban," and I'm so grateful she's been raised with such class.

She orders a drink and I watch her float onto the high stool. Once her eyes have released the bartender from his trance, she turns to me and her face is warm, her eyes are bright and her teeth are wide.

She looks too similar to her. This is a mistake.

Katya asks me about my mother, laughs politely at the right moments, tells me about her mother's recent charity work, and suddenly she gives me my opening.

"And things are the same with my father. He's invited the Undersecretary to the Bulgarian Minister to dinner next week… since he is newly divorced." She takes a sip from her glass and rolls her eyes.

"And what does Andrei have to say about that?"

The perpetual smile melts off her face, and I immediately regret the way it came out. I watch her throat move as she swallows. She sets her glass down.

"How do you know Andrei?" She lifts her brow at me.

"I don't. I've recently been catching up on the gossip columns of the *Daily Prophet* and other papers, and I saw the pictures of the two of you from last year. I did some digging –"

"What do you want, Draco?" Her eyes are firm, her mouth set.

A chill runs through me. She thinks I'm blackmailing her. No better than my father in her eyes.

I look at the bar top. "I'm sorry. That wasn't what I meant."

"What *did* you mean?" Her voice isn't warm anymore. Good for her.

I look up at her and try again. "What I meant to say was, 'It must be difficult for you to pretend not to have Andrei. Difficult for both of you.' And I meant to say, 'Please feel free to speak plainly about him to me.'"

She examines me. I try to let her in, not build up a wall. Try not to ruin this.

"And this is why you wrote to me, asking to catch up? To offer to be my confidante." She swirls her glass on the bar.

"No, not exactly," I say. "But I think we can help each other. If you're in need of help."

She tilts her head at me. "How?"

"You need a pure-blood boyfriend," I say, and I feel a smirk tug at my lips. "And, according to my press agent, I need a desirable social life."

She narrows her eyes at me. "A 'desirable social life,' you say?" She smirks back at me, and I can already tell this is a match made in heaven. "You have Draco Malfoy's looks and wealth.

I see no reason why you shouldn't have a *very* desirable social life."

"I'm readjusting still," I say. I swallow and look away. "From Azkaban." It's incredibly difficult to be this open with another person. "I won't be looking for a wife for quite some time, and I think very few girls would understand that. Especially the girls of the blood status and class that I will be allowed to pick from."

I wait, hoping she understands me. I feel weak. I feel too exposed.

"There is someone you want, but cannot have."

My eyes snap to her. I open my mouth to deny it. And nothing comes out.

Her eyes are kind. Like she understands me. I struggle to find the words to tell her that our situations are not similar. She has Andrei, and I…

"What is your plan? For your 'desirable social life,' Draco Malfoy." She sips from her glass and sends me a friendly wink. My silence has conned her into saying yes somehow, and I feel dirty about it.

"Just dinner dates, photographed in the *Prophet.* Casual, and non-exclusive. For three months. After that we can go our separate ways."

"What happens after three months?" she asks.

"My probation at the Ministry will end. I may move out of the country, change my last name to Black." The last part is a joke, but it's still something I'm considering.

"Hm." She tilts her head at me.

"What?"

"Your father is in Azkaban for the foreseeable future, Draco. I *wish* I was that lucky." She smiles lightly, and I stare at her. "It would mean that my path is my own." She places her hand on my knee and I almost jump at the contact. "You are the last Malfoy. Which means the name is yours to do with as you please."

I stare into her eyes, questioning.

"If you don't like the Malfoy name," she says, "change it. Don't run from it."

The words I've been tossing around in my daydreams flash before my eyes. *Black Consulting Firm. Malfoy-Black Consultation Group.*

Malfoy Consulting Group.

I swallow. And let my eyes drift over her shoulder, thinking.

"Now," she says, bringing me back. "Thursday evening?" She pulls a calendar book from her purse. "There's a restaurant just down the street. I say we meet at the Apparition point and

walk over. Let the *Prophet* photographer know to be ready at 7:30." She looks up at me and grins.

"Thank you, Katya."

She finishes her drink. "And don't forget to let your girlfriend know about this arrangement. I'd be happy to meet her in private so she feels more comfortable."

I feel ice in my veins. "I… That won't be necessary. She's not…" I take a breath and Katya is looking at me. I feel as if I can be honest with her, since we are about to deceive the entire world. "She doesn't want me."

Her eyes take me in, and I'm happy to find there's no pity there. "How is that possible?" She gives a little laugh.

I down my firewhisky, feeling it burn as it licks my throat. I click the glass down against the bar. "Because she knows me."

~*~

Saturday, September 11, 1999

I think she would benefit from *Oculus Dolus*. And I'm quite surprised she's never learned it. It makes me wonder where Blaise found this spell.

I came to Cornerstone about an hour ago, and somehow, I managed to pass her without any awkward hellos. I browsed the fiction titles for a bit, until I finally found the first book of Lance Gainsworth new series. I had no idea he was writing a new series. But I guess that's what I missed in Azkaban.

I'm in an armchair, flipping through it, finding the same prose style and phrasing that I fell in love with from his *Undesirable* series. I'm four chapters in, and she's been staring at me since page two.

I'm only aware of this due to my friend *Oculus Dolus.*

She's watching me read, and a *déjà vu* falls over me. She follows my fingers as they turn pages. She turns away and pretends to write in her ledger book. She looks back at me.

It's a testament to his writing that I cannot decide what holds my interest more: her strange behavior or Lance Gainsworth's new novel.

I clamp down on any foolishness that passes through my mind every time her lips part when I turn a page. Any chill that rustles through me when she blinks and blushes and turns her face away.

She's bewildering to me.

And perhaps I shouldn't come to Cornerstone again.

A hag shuffles past me. She eyes me and I lift a brow at her, then forget that this hag can only see me staring at this book.

When I look back at the front counter, she is helping an older woman, moving into the fiction section. She's pulling a rolling ladder and all I can see is her denims. Jeans, they call them. They pull across her backside as she climbs the ladder. She looks down at the woman to read the titles aloud and her melody floats through the room.

I watch as she almost rolls her eyes at the older woman. I smile and she turns to me. I look down at the book before I remember she can't see where my eyes are.

I look back up as she presses her lips together, turning red. She starts pulling books from the shelves, the older woman telling her life story.

She climbs another rung and I watch her legs in the denim. Her hips. She's reaching for books at the end of the shelf, and her ribs are stretching and I watch the shapes her torso makes, and I wonder if I could make it to her on time if she fell. I take in her flimsy top – t-shirt, they call it – and how it clings to her sides when suddenly the cotton lifts as she leans and I can see her skin. The tops of her hips. The slope of her sides. It's only two inches or so, but it's the parts of her I've never seen.

I tear my eyes from her. I shake the image of standing behind her on the ladder, pressing my fingertips to that skin.

I shouldn't have come back.

I stand, releasing the *Oculus Dolus* spell, and I slip out of the fiction stacks, feeling the fever crawl up my chest.

I'm halfway out the door when I realize I'm holding the Gainsworth book. I turn and she's coming back to the counter, facing away, looking at that ledger book again.

I climb the few steps back to the counter, like she's pulling me back and once I get to the register, my eyes flip to her hips. She's pulled her shirt down again.

Good.

Just before she turns around I assume a casual, leaning position. Like we're friends. Like we're familiar.

I watch as her breath catches.

"Malfoy." She tugs at her shirt again, and I wonder if she knows. "Did you end up liking the new Lance Gainsworth series?"

The little minx. I toss the book on the counter. And her eyes are bright and there's pink on her cheeks and I want to talk to her.

“I'm not sure yet," I say. "But I thought I might as well purchase it, since I've already dog-eared the pages."

Her body stills, and she looks up to me like I’ve just killed her favorite headmaster.

Books. Hermione Granger and books.

I smile. “Relax, Granger.”

Her cheeks start to smile. A small laugh. She looks away.

Look at me.

“I haven’t been able to start this series yet, but I absolutely loved his *Undesirable* series,” she says. Her eyes still looking down at the book at the ledger as she writes.

Look at me.

Hermione Granger and books.

“Really. What did you like about it?” I say. I feel my focus narrowing down on her, my vision blurring around her frame. I lean forward on the counter.

She looks up at me. And there’s something in her expression as her eyes land on me.

“Well.” She drags her fingers through her hair, but she looks away from me. “I appreciate his style.” She tries to look back at me and her eyes move away. She can stare across rooms at me, but she won’t meet my eyes?

She’s describing the *Undesirable* series, looking down at the counter. Like the courtroom. Like Hogwarts.

“I would argue that telling the same story over and over again is tedious,” I stop her. “You get nowhere if you are only stuck on one moment.”

I have no time to dwell on my hypocrisy, before she’s meeting my eyes again.

“I… I disagree.” Her eyes blink at me. “It isn’t the same moment because you are getting the scene from seven different angles, and learning something new every time it is revisited.”

I channel Pansy’s voice: “I found it terribly dull. The storylines were stale, the characters were unimaginative, and I couldn’t connect with that dolt of an Auror running around, mucking up everything…”

I trail off and check in with her. She’s offended. She opens her mouth to speak and stops. She’s going to snap.

“I suppose he was a bit, er…underwritten.”

… What? What’s wrong with her? Fight me.

Now it's time to channel Blaise: "For being the only character to appear in all seven books, I found that he was remarkably uninteresting." I lean lazily, and try to remember Blaise's major complaints. "The Auror had no outside family or friends, so what are we supposed to get from seven novels where he's always two steps behind the Undesirables the entire time –"

"Exactly! That's what makes good drama, Malfoy! The Auror can't be omniscient, or there would be no story!"

Her volume rises, and her eyes brighten.

Come out to play, Granger.

"That's the other thing," I complain. What was it Skeeter said in her review in the *Prophet?* "Why seven novels? Can't it be condensed at all? What about a trilogy? Or even better – one novel with seven perspectives, if you even need them all –"

"One novel!! Fit all of that information into one novel –??"

"If you could call it 'information' –"

"Well, Malfoy, you must have liked something about it if you read all seven books and –"

"I didn't. I read two of them."

She gasps, very melodramatic, and I need to do something with my hands to keep from laughing. I pluck a mint from the bowl on the counter and twist the wrapper between my fingers. I let my eyes rest on her face.

"You only read two! How can you even comment on the series then! The first two are almost juvenile in comparison to the third and fourth –"

"Oh, no," I say. "I read the first and the last."

I watch as her mouth drops open. Her lips are pink. She stutters.

"I… I don't even know how to respond to that." She looks away. Disappointed. And it reminds me of Hogwarts – the way she used to scold the boys.

She's moving quickly, like she wants me out. I twist the mint around, trying to make obnoxious noises.

"It's just an opinion, Granger," I try.

"Well, it's the wrong one."

I laugh before I can stop myself. She's holding the bag out to me. Business is over. But I didn't come here for business.

I lean down onto the counter until I'm eye level with her. Look at me.

“Ya know, Granger,” I say, “you may have just reminded me why I loathe this Grainsword so much –“

“Gainsworth.” And I know she’s just at her tipping point.

“Maybe I don’t want the new book after all.”

And her eyes ignite, her lips spit at me, her skin is on fire. She shoves the bag into my chest with the same strength I felt against my cheek all those years ago. I don’t even listen to her words as she scolds me, condescends me. I watch her face and listen to her tone. And she’s glorious. And intoxicating. And just as I’ve always wanted her.

She’s done. She sucks in air, and the sound rattles me. I’m grateful for the counter between us. It keeps me from doing something incredibly stupid.

“There she is.” It floats out of me like a prayer. She blinks, expecting me to hiss at her. I take the bag held against my chest, hoping to find her skin as it slides out of her grasp. I know I’m smirking at her, my eyes telling her too much, but I can’t stop myself when I say, “Thought we lost you, Granger.”

Her eyes wide and searching. Her cheeks bloom red. And I wonder if this is flirting. I wonder if she recognizes it. If I do.

I lift a brow at her questioning gaze. I push the mint between my lips, hoping it will bring her eyes to my mouth, and I leave before I ruin it. Before I do too much.

I swing the bag on my way out, and force myself not to look back at her. The sunlight splashes my face and as I squint against it, I try not to focus on how wrong that was. How stupid to let her get under my skin.

How will I ever get her back in her box now that she’s out.

~*~

Sunday, January 7, 1996

I knock on the stone door. It’s colder down here than in the Slytherin common room, and I pull my scarf around my neck.

“Yes?”

I push the door open to find Severus standing at a cauldron, sprinkling in lacewing flies.

“Mr. Malfoy,” he greets me. He caps the ingredient flask, and sets the cauldron to stir. “How were your winter holidays?”

I shut the door behind me. I see my hand shake as I take it off the door.

“Excellent, Professor. How were yours?”

I turn to face him, and I let him look into my eyes. I swallow.

He reads me. Like a book. I let him see it all.

The morning I woke to my mother shaking my arm, telling me we have visitors. Her eyes wide and glassy, and she was trembling as she pulled clothes from my closet. The first time I heard his voice, high and slimy and like a song from a nightmare. The vision of my father on bended knee, before a cloaked figure.

“Ah. Young Draco Malfoy. At last we meet.”

I twitch, and I see Severus press his lips together. He waves his hand and silences the room. He looks down at his desk.

“Have you taken the mark?”

“No,” I croak. “Not yet.”

Severus turns and faces his shelves. “What did it feel like to be in his presence? Were you shaking and terrified before him? Or was it a strange calmness.”

“I wouldn’t call it calmness –“

“Was your mind racing, or were you focused?” He snaps.

“More focused than scattered.” I plant my feet and wait.

He sweeps in front of me, arms crossing like a bat. “And what is it that you are here for, Draco?”

I open my mouth to speak, but just stare at him, wanting him to just understand. He stares back.

“You told me you could help me—“

“Help you with what?” He stares into me. He’s going to make me say it.

I took the winter break to clear my mind. No classes, no corridors, no shared meals. She wasn’t there, invading my days. But I could still hear her. Just before I woke in the mornings, whispering exhilarating things into my ear to wake me up hard, or reading the History of Magic assignment to me in the evenings, just as my eyes were sliding off the pages. I tried not to think of her at night, tried to picture someone else as I pumped myself. But she always snaked her way in, just as I was close to finishing, and it would be her eyes looking up at me as I disappeared into her mouth, or her hands sliding around my shoulders. I tried to give up wanking for few days, to find some peace. Maybe a reset. I lasted four days before I gave in and let myself build a fantasy world around her, imagining her lips on mine and her hands on my face.

And then the next morning the Dark Lord was in my house. Like he knew. Like he had been summoned by the thoughts of her.

I look back to Severus. His eyes are blank. I want to learn to do that. I need to.

“I need you to teach me Occlumency.” And it’s like the stone sitting on my chest has been lifted.

Severus nods, and sweeps to the corner of his office. He begins rummaging through drawers.

“You are at an advantage, Draco, that you are able to clear your mind when you wish. There are several schools of Occlumency, and I believe you can master all of them with time. Your… family members,” he says, and I know he means Bellatrix, who is escaping Azkaban as we speak according to father’s conversation with the Dark Lord. “… are only capable of one discipline, rudimentary, but effective.”

He turns and he has in his hands a book and an object wrapped in a cloth. “You will return here on Tuesday evening,” he continues, walking to me. “You will start with basics, like clearing the mind and wall building.” He hands me the book. “You will read the first seven chapters of this text by the time we meet on Tuesday.” I take the book from him, trying to wrap my head around the idea of these lessons on top of normal schoolwork. “Since you are in a position to clear your mind at will, we will begin with the basic pillars of the craft, and build up until you are ready to advance to the more useful concepts, those not found in any book.”

As I’m wondering how Severus was able to master a concept not found in any book, he extends the object wrapped in cloth to me. He continues, “Until that time, keep this in a safe place."

I look up at him. “What is it?” I take it from him, and peel back the dusty cloth to find a jewelry box slightly larger than my hand, made of antiquated mirrors and framed in brass. It reminds me of something my mother has on her vanity table.

“This,” he says, as I open the lid to find it empty, “will be Miss Granger’s box.”

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

I have risen! Thanks for your patience, all. I've had some really incredible real life things happening, and therefore a lot of stress too. A lot of "work hard, play hard" for these past few weeks. I'll be in more of a normal posting schedule again soon.

Monday, September 13, 1999

Skeeter says I have to be at the Ministry early for a photoshoot. I almost hang myself with my old Hogwarts tie right there.

And when I enter the Atrium and Potter is there… well, icing on the cake.

He's eyeing me while Skeeter bounces around, snapping at her photographer, and touching both of our shoulders and chests far too much.

I thought she'd get the shot of me arriving through the fireplaces and walking to the lifts. I had no idea she'd want me to stand here and be greeted by The-Boy-Who-Lived-And-Died-And-Lived-Again.

Catchy, Skeeter.

Skeeter walks away, saying she's going to ask someone about adjusting the lighting in here. Good luck with that. It's an underground tomb.

"Are you ready for this?" Potter asks.

I glance at him, and he's trying so hard to be a friendly presence, but I see right through him.

"I suppose so."

We're turned, facing the Atrium, watching Skeeter drag a maintenance worker around pointing at lighting fixtures. We're shoulder to shoulder.

“Gowain Robards is quite excited to meet you,” he says. “Head of the Auror Department. He’s a pleasant fellow. Appreciates hard work.”

I nod.

“You’ll remember Goldstein. He’s up there.” Potter shifts next to me. “And I should tell you that Katie Bell is up there too.”

Bell. Wonderful. I feel my stomach twist. Why did everyone have to go work for the fucking Ministry.

“You’ll have your own cubicle, but you’ll probably get dragged into team meetings, and brainstorming sessions, and the like. Oh, and there’s a café on this level, just around the corner. Excellent croissants.”

And a familiarity sweeps over me. The two of us, shoulder to shoulder. We might as well be standing on footstools, getting our robes pinned. Only this time it’s Potter talking nervously, and instead of bragging like I did, he’s trying to teach me, trying to make me feel comfortable.

I remember seeing Hagrid out the Madam Malkin’s window, and thinking I’d get a laugh out of this boy. I had already known back then that picking at the weaker or lesser was a talent of mine, and perhaps I’d make a friend if he thought I was funny.

I blink to clear my head as Rita claps her hands, shouting at the photographer.

“Thank you for speaking on behalf of my mother, Potter.” I feel him turn to look at me. “I’m… very grateful that she didn’t have to endure Azkaban for long.”

“Of course. Yes,” he says. “She saved my life once. Thought it best to return the favor,” he says with a smile.

Before it crosses my mind to thank him for speaking at *my* trial, Skeeter is back. She’s telling us to stand in front of the fountain, face each other, and shake hands.

And maybe it’s the memory of Madam Malkin’s, or it’s the absurdity of all this, but Rita sets us up and Potter reaches out his hand, and I say, “Merlin, Potter. Took you eight years to finally shake my hand.”

I clasp his hand, and the camera flashes, and Potter snorts. He’s hiding a smile when he says, “Think of all the unpleasantness we could have avoided.”

I chuckle. Rita asks us to try it again, and then I hear, “Miss Granger!”

I knew I would see her today. But I still feel unprepared for the possibility of spending most of my days with her and Harry Potter.

I turn to see her. Something’s wrong with her hair.

Skeeter is dragging her over, forcing her to stand at Potter's side while we shake hands. Her eyes are wide and her shoulders are tense, and finally Skeeter takes her to the side. I feel like I can breathe again. I look down at my shoes, surprised to see Potter's got a matching pair of dragon leather. Hm. Good for him. Finally dressing himself right.

I look up at him and he's watching me. I restrain myself from sneering back at him, but there's something in his stupid green eyes. Like he's piecing something together. I look away. Focusing on my bricks.

"Bozo, that's enough!" Skeeter yells. And the photographer stands at attention. "Let me have a moment with Mr. Potter, and let's get some shots of Mr. Malfoy heading to the lifts! Miss Granger, why don't you escort him?"

She looks like how I feel. She starts to argue, saying she's not on my floor. I try to remember what floor she is on.

And she's being shoved towards me, and we're walking to the lifts together. She's very stiff. And I wonder if she wants nothing to do with me. If she doesn't want to be pictured with me.

Skeeter yells to us to look in at each other, and we both ignore her. I pull the grate open for her, and she looks up at me, like she's surprised. Does no one pull doors for her? She's Hermione Fucking Granger.

She ducks her head and steps through, and I curse my hand that rises to guide her inside, grazing over the fabric of her blouse. She twitches.

I follow her in, and I can hear Skeeter screeching for us to come back and walk to the lifts again. Like we're actors in her little play. I know Granger hates her, and I'm quite done with this charade myself. I continue to close the gates, like I haven't heard her.

She's running after us, telling us to reset, and I feign ignorance, like I don't know how to get out of an elevator.

"Sorry! It's my first day!"

I hate myself as I check to see if she smiles at this. She's letting out a breath she's holding.

It's just us in the lift as it pulls backwards. I'll probably need to come back downstairs at some point. Or I wonder if Skeeter will come up.

Silence. And I'm regretting this as a familiar scent floats through the lift. Trapped in a box with her. I lean against the wall, away from her. I wonder how natural I could make stumbling into her as the lift zigzags, regaining my balance with my hands on her hips, maybe pressing her into the wall, but then I remind myself that Malfoys do not stumble.

I'm about to say… something, when she talks first.

"If you find that Skeeter is being too much of a 'pest,' I find that a jar with an Unbreakable Charm usually does the trick."

The full weight of her suggestion hits me. And I smirk at her as a wave of pride crashes down on me. She's watching the enchanted papers fly out of the lift.

Look at me.

"How Slytherin of you."

She turns to take me in, and I see her eyes barely dance over my body as I lean casually against the wall. I wait for her to prove her rightful place in Gryffindor, rebuke me for the Slytherin comment. The doors close and she looks away. I watch her press her lips together.

"I just… hate her." She laughs nervously. And the sound twists around my ribs, one by one.

"Come now," I say. "I thought Hermione Granger left all her hate behind at Hogwarts."

She's smiling at her feet when she says, "No, there's a special reserve. Only for Rita Skeeter and those who do not appreciate Lance Gainsworth."

She glances up at me and I can't hold back a grin. I should clarify the Gainsworth predicament, tell her that he's my favorite too – maybe she'll gush about the books again, her eyes light and wide and color on her cheeks – but then the lift doors are opening and a floppy oaf-like creature is calling her name.

She tenses.

"I need you," he says, with a grin. She's grimacing, and there's something familiar about him.

"Aiden. Good morning. You remember Draco Malfoy," she says, not looking at either of us.

I'm standing as tall as I possibly can without a thought. He's got at least two inches on me. He's shaking my hand and grinning, and explaining that he went to Hogwarts with us.

That's not why he's familiar.

"And what do you do here, Aiden?"

"I'm on Level 4 with Granger here, working in the Beast division." He nudges her with his elbow. Friendly. Grinning down at her. Potter doesn't even touch her like that.

And it slams into me like gravity.

Weasley. Weasley, who's tall and broad and dopey. Who talks too loud in confined spaces. Who makes her laugh and makes her cry. Who is allowed to touch her.

My eyes drift to her and she's bouncing with energy. She looks awkward and stiff. He's standing close to her still, and his eyes are on her when he says, "You change your hair?"

Weasley who she'd fix her appearance for. Who she'd pull her curls back for.

"Oh, um, yes." She touches her hair. "I mean, no. It's just braided."

I listen as he tells her it looks nice. As she thanks him. And I'm in the middle of their private conversation.

Nothing about Aiden O'Connor in the papers. But she'd be too smart to let anything about the two of them slip.

The lift slows for Level 4. I imagine her box. I open the lid, and shove the both of them inside, giving them some privacy. Giving myself some space.

Aiden grins and says goodbye. She turns and says, "Have a great first day, Malfoy." She's blushing.

Is she embarrassed that I discovered them?

He's guiding her out of the lift, hand on her back, and she jumps. The doors close on the two of them walking away. And I have two floors to dwell on her hair braided back and his dim-witted grin before I arrive at the D.M.L.E. floor, and I head off to apologize to Katie Bell.

~*~

Sunday, December 25, 1994

The bitch won't even look at me.

She had floated down the stairs like she owned the whole damned castle and giggled like a toddler when Krum escorted her into the Great Hall.

I had to ask Blaise who Krum's date was. He laughed at me.

She's been dancing with the Bulgarian for the past hour, messing up the steps, and smiling, and drinking punch.

And she hasn't spared me a glance. Like *I'm* the one not worthy. And I can't figure out what she's done to herself.

"It has to be a glamour, right?" I watch as she laughs at something Krum says. "She must have cast something –"

"Draco, we *all* have glamours on!" Pansy laughs. I look at her, sitting next to me at our table.

"What?"

"I've got a Skin Shining Spell and a Hair Holding Charm going right now. I'm sure every girl here has cast beauty spells –"

"No, no," I wave her off. "This is something different. You look as pretty as you always do. But, Granger…" I sneer as she starts swaying to the music. "She's done something drastic." She smiles and touches Krum's arm.

"Are you saying you find Hermione Granger pretty?" Pansy asks.

I whip my head to face her, and she's teasing me.

"Don't be daft. Of course not," I say. "I'm saying she's a filthy, deceiving Mudblood, and she has no right to walk among us like she's one of us."

Krum dips her.

I glare at her as she laughs, hoping she'll feel it, but of course she still won't look at me.

Later on, Pansy and I resume our dancing, and I try to keep my focus on the steps, but *she's* in the middle of the floor fucking them up. I have to remind myself that she's had no formal training. She's a Mudblood and wouldn't know a waltz if it slapped her in the face.

I glance to Potter and Weasley, slouching and pouting. She's burning bridges right and left it seems. This night is for the *champions*.

"What's happened to her teeth? That must be it." I spin Pansy in a circle.

"She fixed them months ago."

"What?" I look down at her. She's rolling her eyes at me.

"When you hit her with that beaver spell, or whatever it was, she shrank them down with Pomfrey."

"How is that fair!" I glare at her across the room. "You can't just go changing your appearance all willy-nilly!"

"Draco, can we please talk about something other than the Mudblood?"

I look down at her and Pansy has a brow lifted at me. She's bored.

"Of course," I say. "I'm just irritated by her, that's all."

"Well, obviously. She's foul." She rolls her eyes. "Even all gussied up, she's still just a Mudblood in a dress."

I look over at said Mudblood, and find her blushing at something Krum has whispered to her. I see her mouth the words "thank you" and smile up at him through her lashes. My mind races with all the possible things that could make her smile like that and I look down at Pansy again.

"You look beautiful tonight, Pans."

Pansy looks up, eyes wide. "Thank you," she says. And she looks down at our feet, blushing.

I look over at Krum again. He twirls her. She laughs as she stumbles. She doesn't care that she looks like an idiot, or that her date is clearly more trained than she is.

I look down at Pansy. She would right herself. She would float back into my arms and smile if I reached my arm out to twist her underneath. Her steps would be sure and she would glide, not bumping into the opposite couples, no apologies and laughter.

I hear the Mudblood laugh again, and I focus on Pansy's face, focus on not turning to watch.

The song ends and I take Pansy to the punch bowl, meeting with Blaise and Theo there. I keep my back to the room as Pansy chats with Daphne, and Blaise offers me a smoke on the balcony. They've found a spot that Filch isn't keeping an eye on. I follow Blaise and Theo over to the curtains, and I find a blue dress in the crowds again. I turn away.

Marcus Flint is on the balcony with three Durmstrang boys. He passes me a smoke and I inhale deeply. There is probably some kind of herb in this roll, something from the greenhouses.

"You know Viktor's date?" One of the Bulgarian's asks Flint in a thick accent.

"Isn't that Potter's Mudblood?" Flint turns to me as I pass him back the smoke. "Granger, right?" I nod. "Why isn't she here with Potter tonight?"

I look up and he's directing the question to me.

"How am I supposed to know?" I snarl at him. He lifts a brow.

"She is Mudblood?" Another Bulgarian. "She must be very good in the bed!"

The Bulgarians laugh. Marcus laughs. Blaise and Theo laugh.

I stare at the smoke curling from the tip of a cigarette.

"No, no," Marcus says, and he pulls back the edge of the curtain, revealing just enough of the dance floor to see a blue dress spin in a circle. "She's a prude. Krum's not getting anywhere near those knickers."

She spins into view again, and the dress rises to reveal her calves. I blink.

"Doesn't hurt to try, though," Marcus says. I hear the Bulgarians laugh.

"Not at all!"

I tear my eyes away from her body falling against Krum as she laughs. I turn to see a balcony of boys puffing smoke and watching her chest rise and fall, eyes glinting and smiles tugging their mouths.

How has she done this? This is absolute insanity. She's charmed the room, or slipped a potion into all of our pumpkin juices at breakfast.

She gets swept up into another dance with Krum, and I'm mourning the loss of my respect for him.

The Bulgarians and Marcus talk of something else. I don't listen. I look up to excuse myself back inside, and Blaise is watching me.

As I re-enter, I hear the beginning of strings, and several French girls coo and grab their dates. Fleur Delacour passes in front of me, dragging Roger Davies to the dance floor. As my eyes dart across her body – as they always do when the part-Veela is close by – I wonder if there's something chemical happening with Granger. Some Veela gene, hidden by years of Squibs. It would explain everything.

I find her in the crowd, taking her place with Krum in the circle. The strings buzz. The French Waltz.

She looks around the room for a moment, looking for Merlin-knows who, but her eyes pass right over me. Never looking at me.

She smiles with perfectly sized teeth at Krum. He bows.

Bowing to a Mudblood. The bile rises in my throat.

She curtseys, and it looks like she may fall over. I pace the edge of the couples, looking for Pansy, keeping my gaze on her.

They spin around each other, and I get to see Krum's face. Enamored. I think of Marcus's eyes on her body. The Bulgarians laughing about her in bed.

It doesn't make any sense.

Two couples away from them, a pretty Ravenclaw dances with a Durmstrang boy. I tap him on the shoulder. "Get lost."

He must know who I am, because he moves. The Ravenclaw smiles at me. I think I smile back.

I take her through the steps. She tries to talk to me, but I'm waiting.

And finally we separate. And the Mudblood steps towards me, her smile still on her lips. And she looks at me. And she gasps. Like she's afraid.

You should be afraid of me, Granger. I'm going to discover all your secrets.

I'm looking for it. For the glamour, or the Veela gene. I bow to her, even as it repulses me, and I watch as she presses her lips together and curtseys to me.

She rises, and I still can't find it. I lift my hand, and I realize that she'll have to touch me.

She brings her palm to mine, and I wait. Nothing. Her hand hovers an inch away. I'm relieved, I think.

I turn around her. And I think of Krum spinning her in circles and the breathless smile on her face. She's stone cold now, short breaths coming in rapid succession, and I don't let my eyes

wander to her pulsing chest.

We return to our original spots, and I'm turning away to find the Ravenclaw girl again before I realize that I learned nothing, except for the rhythm of her breathing, or the way her neck blushes.

I finish the dance, and return to Pansy's side. Like nothing's happened. Like I just went for a smoke with the boys.

Pansy links her arm with mine, and continues talking to Daphne. I watch Granger as Krum kisses her knuckles, leaving her side. She smiles after him. And I see her eyes search the ballroom.

I look away.

"Draco," Pansy says, and her voice is soft in my ear. "Do you want to go back to the dungeons?"

No. But I also don't know why I want to stay.

"Everyone will still be at the Ball. We'll have the dormitories to ourselves," she says.

I turn to look at Pansy. Her eyes are dark and promising me things.

"Yeah, alright." My throat is dry.

We slip out, and down to the dungeons. She follows me into the boys' dormitories, and her hands are sure as they slip off her gown, and I'm wondering where these glamours are that she's cast. I don't see any difference in her. Not like on Granger.

And Pansy's hands are slipping the buttons from my dress robes, and her lips are kissing my neck and I press my fingers into her hair, not finding any magic there to hold it together.

I jump when she reaches for my trousers, and as she unbuttons them, I pull back to look at her.

"Are you… You want to?"

She smiles at me, and I kiss her. I wonder how's she learned some of the things she's doing, but I don't really care when she takes off her underthings and lays down on my bed. I take off the rest of my clothing and when I join her, she's breathing heavily, and I stare at her face, looking for her Skin Shining Spell. I don't see it.

When we begin, it feels like slipping into heaven, and I try to touch her so she feels as good as I do, but I know this won't take long.

I'm trying to last longer, closing my eyes and trying to think of Quidditch teams, and counting the potions bottles in my trunk, when her fingers thread through my hair. It feels good so I try it on her.

My face is pressed into her neck and I run my fingers through her hair and it's too short. I try again, and the silky strands slip through my fingers, nothing I can hold onto.

I imagine what it would be like to have a fistful of a girl's hair in my fingers, pulling her neck open to me, and I feel my hips snap quickly.

Pansy squeaks, and her pitch is too high. Her breathing is too heavy instead of quick and short. I try to think of what it would be like with someone who whispers into my ear in low tones and laughs when it makes her feel good, perfectly sized teeth smiling up at me.

What it would be like to do this again, and take my time on her body, trying to touch her all over first, instead of jumping right into it. My hand snakes down and her hips are thinner than I remembered, and I'm imagining a slim waist with wider hips, and my fingers squeeze.

My hips are snapping too quickly and I can hear her squeaking under me, and I'm almost done, but wishing that I could have made her cry out too, and maybe she'd squeeze around me until I popped, as I buried my face into her curls –

And I come with a yelp, and her fingers are digging into my shoulders, nails too long, breathing too heavy, and when I've recovered I pull back to look at her.

I don't know why I'm surprised that it's Pansy beneath me.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

Very excited for this chapter - A piece of this chapter was the first piece of Draco's POV that I wrote, almost a year ago before I even decided on writing All the Wrong Things. Glad it's finally seeing the light of day!

A little fun announcement: I have been chosen for this month's Ask Me Anything on the FB group Strictly Dramione! If you are a part of the group, swing by this Monday June 25 to ask any questions you have. If you're not a part of the FB group, check them out! Great people, great recommendations. Must be 18+

Tuesday, September 14, 1999

“He was never a Dark Wizard.”

It screams at me from the thin pages of the *Prophet*, and I feel the paper crumple against my fingers.

“He was never a Dark Wizard.”
-Hermione Granger, Brightest Witch of Our Age

When asked for her thoughts on her old classmate, Hermione Granger assured us that Mr. Malfoy is fully capable. With the gleam of infatuation in her eyes, she told yours truly all about how ambitious and intelligent she finds Mr. Malfoy, and how well she thinks he’ll fit in.

And who could blame her! Mr. Malfoy started his first day at the Ministry in well-tailored grey robes…

I squint down at the pages, trying to figure out where Skeeter has embellished the interview as she always does.

“He was never a Dark Wizard.”

She has too much faith in me, that’s for sure.

I blink away and grin at the picture of my handshake with Potter, counting the people who will have a heart attack at seeing this. But my eyes are drawn back to my hand on her back, her eyes staring up at me as I usher her into the lift.

I swallow. Our first picture together. I shake my head. Our *only* picture together, I'm sure.

"Rita did a lovely job, didn't she?"

I look up and my mother is reading the same paper over her morning tea.

"Yes," I say.

"You should send her a note, letting her know how grateful you are."

I look up at her, and she's eyeing me.

"Of course. Excellent idea, Mother."

I look back down at the paper and there's my hand on her back again.

"The renovations will begin this weekend," she says. I glance at her again, her eyes back on the paper. "I've hired elves."

"Wonderful."

A *pop* and Mippy is there, holding a letter. "This arrived for you, sir."

I'm still trying to get used to Mippy calling me "sir." I thank her and find a familiar wax seal on the envelope. My lips twitch, and I smile when I pull out a short note and the clipping of Potter and me shaking hands.

Merlin, Draco. Didn't know how hard pressed you were for friends. I'm on my way.

BZ

I'm grinning down at the page. He's drawn some rather inappropriate pictures on Potter's face.

~*~

Tuesday, December 27, 1994

"I owe you a thank you, Draco."

I look up from my book through tired eyes to see Blaise flopping down into the armchair across from me. The fire is almost out in the common room.

"Oh, really?"

"Mm-hmm," he hums. "It seems that Daphne and Pansy have some sort of rivalry going right now – some 'girl thing' –" He waves his hand, like a fly has gotten in his way. "Anyway, let's

just say that Pansy likes to brag, and Daphne won't be out done."

He grins at me, a secret smirk.

I blink at him. "Okay…"

"You and Pansy shagged after the Yule Ball, yes?" He spells it out for me. I feel heat on my neck.

"Oh, er…" I look around, finding no one listening. "Yes."

"Daphne told me that piece yesterday. Right before she pulled me into a broom closet." He smirks.

"Oh," I say, finally understanding. "Good on you, mate." I frown. "A broom closet?"

He nods at me, then leans forward in his chair, elbows on his knees. "Yeah, you have to try it," he says. "It was wild."

He continues. He talks about knocking the equipment over until they found a bare wall, silencing the closet, finding the best position. I keep checking the rest of the common room, making sure no one is overhearing.

"What about you?" he says. "I'm sure with your 'Malfoy sensitivities,' you had her in your four-poster, candles lit, rose petals on the sheets…" He's grinning at me, shaking his head.

"No candles or roses, but yes." I roll my eyes at him, and I wonder how he's so at ease talking about this in public. I've been trying to keep that night off my mind for the past few days, and I wonder, if Blaise is able to speak so freely… perhaps there *is* some kind of conservative view that's been ingrained in me that makes me hesitant. "But I'll have to try the broom closet next time," I try.

"They don't take *appointments* there," he says. "You'll have to try being spontaneous for once."

"I'm spontaneous," I huff. I think of the conversations I overhear at Quidditch practice, between Marcus and other boys. I realize I've joined their "club." I know things now, and I have things to contribute.

"How long did you last?" he asks.

I glare at him, knowing what he's insinuating. "Hours," I say drily.

"Yeah, me neither." He grins. "I tried to get her off first, but it was taking too long." He sits back in his chair, and I try to forget that this is Daphne we're talking about. "You?"

I try to imitate his nonchalance. I smirk. "Yeah, once we got going I wasn't thinking much about her."

The double meaning hits me so hard that I feel the smirk slapped off my face. I see wide eyes underneath me instead of Pansy's deep-set pair, my face buried in curls instead of Pansy's bare neck. I blink, and take a breath, and look back up at him.

He's watching me. His eyes are tight. He takes a breath and says, "Do you know anyone with the password to the prefects' bath? I'd love to try it in water." And I feel like he's changed the subject. Purposefully.

We chat a bit back and forth, and I'm relaxing into this comradery, this brotherhood. He brings up a few sixth years who broke up at the Yule Ball, and jokes that I had a vastly better evening than them.

I smile.

"Granger was blubbering all over the place that night."

My eyes snap to him. "Why?" I regret it as soon as it leaves me.

He shrugs. "Dunno. Some fight with Weasley." His gaze comes back to me. "Or maybe Krum got fresh with her."

I swallow, and I feel the muscles in my jaw tighten. I smile lightly.

"He's an idiot for taking the Mudblood in the first place – to think she'd give him anything in return."

"Yeah." He stares at me. "Such a stupid thing. To fall for a Mudblood. Especially her."

His eyes are black and on me. I wish we were talking about sex in broom closets again.

"I couldn't agree more," I say.

~*~

Friday, September 17, 1999

"Merlin's Balls, it's been a long week."

I look up from stirring my tea to find Anthony Goldstein pulling a teacup from the cupboard. I nod in solidarity.

"Did you see the memo on the Durmstrang families?" Goldstein asks.

"No, not yet. I've been in the conference room."

"It's confirmed that it's Borisov and Dimov." He tips his cup at me. "You were right. Good call, Malfoy."

I suppress a smirk, and settle for nodding my head at him again.

“Malfoy.” A new voice at the kitchenette entrance. I turn and it’s Potter. “Do you have those reports on the Borisov and Dimov families? Turns out you were right.”

I bring a hand to cup my ear. “Sorry, I missed that last part, Potter?”

He frowns and places his hands in his pockets. “I never said it wasn’t them, I just said we should have reports on all possible Bulgarian families –“

“Hmm?” I’m leaning towards him, like I’m hard of hearing.

He sighs. “I said, ‘you were right.’”

“Oh, splendid.” I turn back to my tea, stirring in the last of the honey. “Yes, the Borisov and Dimov reports are finished. In the conference room.”

“You don’t think Robards is going to have us stay past five, do you?” Goldstein whines. “I really need that drink.”

“No, it can’t be that pressing. It can wait ‘til Monday.” Potter hovers in the doorway and I glance at him. He’s watching me fix my tea with an odd look on his face.

“Brilliant,” Goldstein mutters. “Still that pub down the street?”

“Er, yes.” Potter looks up at me. “Would you want to join us, Malfoy?”

I blink. I haven’t listened to hardly a word they’ve said. “Where?”

“Er… A small group of us is heading to the pub on the corner after work. Just a few people from the office.”

I open my mouth to decline. To make some excuse about having far more interesting plans for a Friday evening. To possibly bite back about not wanting to spend any more time with them than necessary.

“First round’s on me?” Potter says. Hands still in his pockets like some five-year-old. His brows are lifted. And I’m thinking of Madame Malkins again, and my hand outstretched to him on the train to Hogwarts when I say yes.

We walk over together, like a band of brothers, like a group of friends. Katie Bell is with us, and even she is asking me about my first week, about my mother.

Bloody Gryffindors.

Potter, true to his word, won’t let me near the bar to pay for my own drink, so I’m stuck with Goldstein and Bell for a few minutes.

They’re nice enough. They grab a high-top table against the wall as we wait for Potter, and they talk about the case at work, which is odd because I thought the point of getting together outside the office would be to *not* talk about the office, but I guess I still have a lot to learn about co-worker dynamics.

When Potter returns, he sits across from me. After fifteen minutes or so, Bell suddenly waves to someone and runs away faster than I can blink. It's getting crowded here, and I wonder if it will only get more impacted the longer the night goes on. I take a deep breath.

Bell returns with the female Weasley, who claims the chair next to Potter, sending me an odd smile in greeting. She's never smiled at me before.

And before I can do something insipid, like wave, Granger appears over her shoulder, saying hello to Potter, her presence small. She's done something to her hair again. I see Goldstein raise a hand to wave at her as he continues on about the Borisov and Dimov families, and she looks up and smiles quickly. She leans against the wall next to Weasley's chair.

Does she not want a chair? Is she not staying long? She's the Brightest Witch of Our Age, why are there not chairs immediately available for her?

I take a long drink from my glass, fingers beginning to itch.

I've done a fine job of avoiding her all week. We came through the fireplaces at the same time on Wednesday, and I managed to walk at the perfect pace to the lifts so that she got there first and completely missed me. I've had to drop my walls all week, meeting new people, apologizing to old people. Interacting with her without my mental defenses would not have been… advisable.

She's watching Goldstein intently as he speaks. And I wonder if keeping her eyes off of me is an active choice, or if I really do not warrant a hello.

"Surely, the Scandinavian Minister of Magic will deal with them?" Bell offers.

"Not likely," I say, chiming in for the first time since she sat down. I feel all eyes turn on me. All but one pair. "The Minster's sister has been married off to Dimitri Borisov's older brother. The families are very close."

I hear Bell groan, shaking her head.

"So, if they are turned over to their own government, they won't be punished?" Goldstein confirms.

I nod, and in my peripheral vision I see Granger push her hair over her shoulder. My hand twitches around my glass.

I try to concentrate on what Potter is saying. After ten more minutes of this – and she is still standing at the table like she doesn't even want a chair – I see the Weasley girl lean down and whisper something into her ear. She jumps and then blushes. I look away as the color creeps up her neck and focus again on Potter. She slips out and disappears. I feel like I can breathe again.

"—to discuss it on Monday with Robards—"

"I have to say, this is exactly what I thought lounging in the Gryffindor common room would be like," I cut off Potter. "'Let's all sit around and talk about what the last eight hours were

like for us.'"

Potter grins, and Bell and Goldstein laugh.

"Not all of us spent the evening hours on our hair, Malfoy," the Weasley says, with a smirk to rival my own.

As the table chuckles, I grin back at her. "Clearly. From the way Potter's sticks out at all ends."

Potter reaches up to flatten his hair down. "It's getting better, isn't it?"

"Of course it is, sweetie," Weasley says. She pulls a face, and the table laughs again.

I'm still grinning when a full firewhisky glass slides into my hand. I look up and Granger has brought us another round. Me, included. Like I'm one of her friends. She's gathering the empty glasses, standing next to Bell at the head of the table, and she's right there next to me.

And like always, she's avoiding my eyes.

And I do something stupid.

"After you're done liberating the dragons and the centaurs, Granger, you should consider a career in waiting tables."

And she looks up at me. And I realize the comment has lacked a compliment or an insult. It is simply nothing. But she's searching me for the something.

And the ginger cuts in, with some comment about Granger's clumsiness – a trait I've never seen – and it's like the Weasley girl just saved us both from I don't know what.

She's still standing close to me when Bell announces that she's going to have a baby. And I'm trying not to watch Granger as she reacts. Thankfully my focus is pulled when Bell mentions Quidditch.

"There's an interdepartmental Quidditch league at the Ministry?" I ask. And silence. And I realize I'm not invited.

Potter clears his throat to deliver the news, or lie, or let me down easy, and he says, "Yes, we formed it just a few months back. You game, Malfoy?"

I should scoff and tilt my nose in the air and tell them I have better things to do than to play amateur Quidditch with them.

And instead I'm asking if they have a Seeker.

Granger is moving back to her perch near the wall, and I think it's because the subject is Quidditch, but I can still feel her eyes on me as Potter offers me the third Chaser position.

"…If Katie's out then we'll need a third, with me and Ginny."

I turn my head to Weasley, and my gaze is that much closer to landing on her, leaning against the wall, holding her Butterbeer like a weapon.

“And how did you manage to make the D.M.L.E. team if you are not a D.M.L.E. officer?” I ask. I’m wondering if this light banter between the Weasley girl and me will last.

She simply smirks at me again, and says “Dating Harry Potter has its perks.”

She was an incorrigible flirt back at Hogwarts, too. And here she is, on the arm of the most famous boy in the wizarding world, and she’s smirking at me like she’s testing me.

And I feel Granger’s eyes on me, and I wonder if I can keep them there.

“I’ll have to try it sometime.”

I smirk. The Weasley girl smirks back. The table chuckles, and snorts, and her eyes are still on me, where they belong. And I don’t dare look at her. I’ll break whatever spell she’s under now.

Potter starts giving me details on Quidditch. He’s the team captain – of course – and he throws out a few plays that the D.M.L.E. team is fond of. Granger is still standing next to the Weasley girl and *will no one get her a fucking chair* and I hear Goldstein ask her about her job, ask her for book recommendations for his mother.

And I can’t help myself.

“She should try the *Undesirable* series.”

I glance at her and she’s glaring at me. I smirk back.

“It’s really quite crafty. It’s seven novels, all different perspectives on the same moments. Some would say that it’s tedious that way, but Gainsworth manages to keep it interesting, revealing new information each time the scene is revisited.”

As I speak her eyes ignite and a blush spreads up her jaw. I notice just then she’s wearing makeup of some kind on her eyes.

“Okay, thanks,” Goldstein says. “And it’s by…?”

I open my mouth but she beats me to it.

“Lance Gainsworth.”

I sip from my glass to keep from smiling. I see that hers is almost empty.

“And you agree, Hermione?” Anthony says to her.

“Oh, yes.” She shoots me a glare and I keep my eyes on hers. “You could even say that I have the exact same opinion.”

This does make me smile and I step away from the table before I begin laughing. I down what's left in my glass and head to the bar, thinking of her empty Butterbeer glass. The bartender is swamped. It's much more crowded than before. I'm almost to the front of the line when I glance back at the table and see that she's finally gotten herself a fucking chair, but now she's talking to no one, looking down at the table and trying to be interested in what Potter and Goldstein are discussing.

I order a firewhisky for me, and I order a Butterbeer before I can stop myself. I turn back and when the crowd parts, someone's taking the stool next to her. She's turning to face him with a small smile.

It's O'Connor. And I feel my molars grind together.

She looks uncomfortable though. Maybe he's not supposed to approach her in public.

I continue to them. I still need to repay her a drink. I refuse to owe her any favors.

Timing always was my strong suit, and this is no exception when she tries to take a sip from her empty glass and O'Connor says, "Let me get you another drink."

I slip her Butterbeer between them. Standing tall as I can, but still looking up at O'Connor's dopey face.

"O'Connor, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Malfoy, good to see you," he says, and he actually looks like he means it. He shakes my hand. "How was your first week?"

"Excellent, thank you."

I wait for him to invite me to join them, to claim her and allow my presence. But he excuses himself. Perhaps… they weren't…

He touches her shoulder gently as he leaves, and I have to tear my eyes away from the spot, watching his retreating back as he heads to the bar. He greets someone exuberantly, with a loud noise and a louder gesture.

A small "thank you" brings me back to her, and she's nodding at the Butterbeer. With as much confidence as I can gather, I take the seat next to her, facing her.

"He reminds me of Weasley." It's out of my mouth before I can stop it. And I blame the firewhisky.

This brings her eyes to me at least. She's in the middle of sipping from her glass. Her eyes are wide and round as she brings the glass down.

"Ron?"

"No, the mother," I quip. "Yes, Ron." The syllable in my mouth is foul.

I watch as she turns to look at Aiden, like she's expecting to find him with red hair today.

"Is it the way he smiles and shakes your hand that brings up memories of Ron?" She turns back to me and sends me a small grin. Like we have a private joke.

"That must be it."

"You seem to be fitting in with the Gryffindors quite nicely," she says, voicing all my concerns.

"Well, Goldstein is a Ravenclaw, so we cling to each other whenever anyone tries to run into a burning building to save kittens."

I watch as she smiles into her Butterbeer. A real smile. And I'm forgetting why I've stayed away from her all week.

"I would have thought you'd be saving house-elves, not studying dragons."

That's why. I squeeze my glass, feeling my ring scrape along the side of it while she stares at me, her eyes dancing over my face. It's too intimate. To know these details.

She has Butterbeer foam on her lips, and just as I notice it her pink tongue peaks through her lips to clean it off, then disappears back into her mouth. It's almost obscene. If she had any idea what she was doing.

I feel my chest heat, and I swallow as she looks past me, talking to some point over my shoulder. She says some drivel about wanting to work with the house-elves *eventually,* and I say, "Shouldn't they be bending over backwards to give you whatever position you desire? Or did you forget to put 'Golden Trio' on your resume?"

She looks down at her hands. "I actually submitted under a false name."

I squint at her. "And why was that?"

Her eyes are glassy when she looks up at me, and I wonder how much of this conversation is due to her loose tongue. I watch as she takes in my face, and then a deep breath in, like she's stopped breathing.

"I didn't really want to be handed anything after the war," she says. She looks away from me, and I wonder what it is just past my shoulder that she's looking at. "I wanted to earn my position based on merit and not on who I befriended as a First Year."

She smiles into her glass. Shy. Like she's done something wrong. Like she doesn't want to be looked at. I frown.

I think of the girl who conned Umbridge out of her office and into a forest of angry centaurs, the girl who dragged Goyle up onto her broomstick as the Fiendfyre licked her heels, the girl who campaigned to free the house-elves, who discovered the monster in Slytherin's chamber, who slapped me with hot eyes and hissed against my face – and a blue dress spinning.

She looks up at me cautiously, like she's forgotten who she is.

"You think that's why they call you the Golden Girl? Because Potter and Weasel allowed you into their club?"

Her eyes are deep as she watches me, her breath short. Do I really need to explain it to her, of all people?

And suddenly her eyes flit to my mouth. And I feel the air leave my chest slowly.

"Hey Granger!"

She's taken from me as O'Connor tries to pull her to him. I watch her blink, eyes hazy, and yell to him across the bar. I watch her turn down his offer, and her cheeks are pink. I'm thinking of her hair pulled back and the makeup on her eyes when O'Connor yells to her about "next time."

Was it for him? The hair, the makeup. Like it had been for Weasley and Krum, and even McLaggen.

She watches O'Connor leave, bringing her glass to her lips. My neck is hot and I speak without thinking.

"How long have you been seeing him?"

She jerks to look at me. "What?"

I feel the alcohol sloshing through the cracks in my brick wall.

"O'Connor," I say. "You're together?" And I drink more to forget that I'm drunk.

Her eyes pop open, like she's been caught. She opens her mouth and squeaks and Potter's voice cuts her off.

"Hey, Ginny and I are going to head out. Hermione, did you want to stay or side-along with us?" Potter asks.

She looks back and forth between the two of us for a moment. I can't be trusted alone with her.

"I'm about to head out too," I say. I glance at her wide eyes and slack jaw and I say, "She should side-along with you, Potter. She shouldn't be Apparating anywhere."

She frowns, and tries to prove her sobriety by falling off the stool. It's precious. I grasp her elbow before she falls, and only when she realizes it, do I let go. I have to separate from her before I do something awful. Like reach for her curls.

Potter's confirming with me about Quidditch tomorrow, and she's blushing red, looking a bit lost, and I wonder why she didn't go with O'Connor, come to think of it.

“Looking forward to it, Potter,” I say. And she looks up at me with her dark eyes.

“Goodnight, Draco,” she whispers.

And it sounds better on her lips than it ever did from my imagination, from my cell in Azkaban as I drifted off, or in my four-poster bed as my hand wandered down my stomach.

She blinks her eyelashes at me and turns to let Potter lead her out. He waves back and I nod. When the door closes behind them, I breathe.

As the sound of her voice saying my given name bounces around my head, I wonder what would happen if I didn’t bring my walls back up.

~*~

Saturday, September 18, 1999

Getting back into an organized sport was a dream. Even with Potter at the lead. Even with a slight headache from the firewhisky.

I tried to be a “team player” all morning, listening to Potter’s plays and assisting the Weasley girl to score instead of taking the Quaffle all the way myself. They even invited me to catch a drink after practice with the team, but I had to decline.

I’m headed back to Azkaban today to see my father.

I push the hair back from my brow, slicking it like he always taught me. It looks odd in the mirror after wearing it loose for the past few weeks. I can see my whole forehead.

Mother has been hovering all morning, and although I appreciate the tea, and the scones, and the fixing of my collar, I eventually snap at her to leave me alone.

I flip open the folio on the bathroom sink. I stare down at the pages, and look up into the mirror, practicing what my facial expressions will be.

“It’s a kind of consulting firm, Father,” I whisper. I grimace. I shake my head and look directly into my eyes in the mirror. “I’m starting a business. I need my inheritance.” I squint at myself. No, no. Play to his weaknesses. “I’d like to start a business. In the Malfoy name. But I need your help, Father.”

I close my eyes and think of bricks and stones, and mortar and cement, and I open my eyes to find them blank. In the far right corner of my mind I close the lid on a brass-lined jewelry box.

A stray hair is out of place. I dip the comb back in the gel.

I’m pacing the library at 3:42. Mother peaks in the doors.

“Do you need anything, Draco?”

“No,” I bark. “Thank you,” I say softer.

She nods, and stands there. “Remember, the money is yours, Draco. It’s just the timetable that you are negotiating.”

“I know, Mother.” I cross back to the chairs, then turning on my heel and to the fireplace again. The timetable, and the marital stipulations.

“Skeeter will get a picture of you leaving. Says she wants to spin it into a piece about your bachelorhood.”

I stop in my pacing. “How so?”

“Your inheritance, released to you without a wife. You’d be quite desirable.”

I laugh. “That’s the least of my concerns.”

My wand buzzes in my pocket, letting me know it’s 3:45. I grab the folio, my hands slipping on the leather. I nod at her and toss the Floo powder into the fireplace.

I step through and a familiar smell assaults me. Azkaban.

A guard greets me, scowling. I don’t recognize him from my time here, but I’m sure he knows exactly who I am. He is rougher with my belongings than he needs to be, but after a thorough examination of the folio, we are walking down a familiar hall. The visitation cells.

He pulls the door for me, and I take a breath before stepping in.

He’s got his back to me. He’s standing on the other side of the table, facing away, like he’s examining something out a window, but there are no windows. A power play.

He turns once the door is closed. His eyes land on me, and he gives an honest smile.

“Hello, Draco.”

“Father.” My voice is strong. I wonder if we hug. Or shake hands. Instead I do nothing.

“Please, have a seat.” Ever the generous host.

I pull the metal chair and sit, placing the folio on the table. He eyes it but says nothing.

“How have you been?” I ask.

“Oh, the same. How do you feel?” he says. “Being out?”

“Some days it feels the same,” I answer honestly. His face is kind. And I remember that I haven’t seen him in a year and a half. He hasn’t wrinkled at all. “Mother sends her regards.”

“Yes, the same to her,” he says. “I am so glad you chose to come see me on this visit, Draco. As much as I appreciate seeing your mother, of course.”

“Of course. It’s been too long.” I lie.

“But, I feel like you have another motive?” His eyes slide down to the folio.

“You could say that.” I smile lightly. I lean forward in my chair. “As you must know, I started work at the Ministry this week.” He nods, and I carry on. “And although it is obviously a probationary job, it’s been enough for me to know that I don’t want to work as a dreg for the rest of my life.” I check in with him. “*Malfoys* don’t file reports.” He lifts a brow in approval. I clear my throat. “I’ll be done there on December 10th, and I’ve been thinking about what I’d like to do after. Being sedentary in Azkaban has given me quite a drive to achieve, to strive for something.” I look him in the eye, the facial expression I’ve practiced. “I’d like to start a business. In the Malfoy name. But I need your help, Father.”

His eyes turn on the folio, and he settles back in his chair.

“A business.”

“Yes,” I say. “A consulting firm. Malfoy Consulting Group. I want to rehabilitate our family’s image and start to make a name for myself in the world.” I reach for the leather folio, gripping it in my hands like a shield. “I have mission statements, business models, financial analyses and other paperwork here.”

I start to flip it open.

“And you will need your inheritance,” he says.

I look up at him. I focus on stillness, on my bricks.

“Yes, that is part of it.”

He presses his lips together. He folds his hands on the table. “This is all very well thought out, Draco. I’m quite taken by surprise.” He smiles and it doesn’t reach his eyes. “You must have been planning this for some time.”

I nod. “I’m sure I don’t have to tell *you* that one needs to find ways to keep occupied in Azkaban.” I grin.

He nods at the table. His thumbs spin around each other. He stands smoothly.

“This is all very impressive.” He strolls around his chair and looks back at the blank wall. “And I’m inclined to help you.” My pulse jumps. He turns and leans his arms on the back of the chair. “But you’ll have to decide what you want more, Draco.” He levels his eyes on me, and I feel quite young. “This business, or your Mudblood.”

He blinks at me calmly.

I remain still, my breathing even – a technique I learned from him. The bile rises in my throat at the thought of him knowing about her. And I swallow involuntarily.

He sees it. And smiles.

There's no point in game-playing, asking him to clarify, asking him "which Mudblood."

The brass-lined jewelry box rattles.

"Don't blame your grandmother for tattling, Draco. She was quite concerned after your little lunch with her." He stands tall and starts a slow pace around the table. "She came to me, asking me to take pity on your circumstances. Telling me all about how difficult it was for her to lose Andromeda." The name is hissed next to my ear as he moves behind me. "I was quite confused," he chuckles, and I resist the urge to crack my neck. "*My son?* Running off with a *Muggle-born?"* He curves his path around my back. I don't trust myself to correct him. "*My son?* Jeopardizing his inheritance, his livelihood, for a Mudblood." He appears over my left shoulder, stopping there, like he wants me to look up at him. "And then I hear whispers of this… Auction. Certain numbers are being tossed out." He pauses, like I'm supposed to react. "And a few short months later, there she is, writhing on our drawing room floor. And there *you* are… weak for her."

I hear the echo of her scream against the fireplace. My eye twitches and he sees it. He comes around the table, taking his chair again.

"After all that time with Severus behind my back, I was quite surprised to see your emotions get the best of you."

I meet his eyes. I feel him press against my walls, but I'm confident in my abilities. I see the moment he knows he can't get in. And then he grins slowly at me, like some jungle cat.

"It's a shame Voldemort did not win, you know." He looks into me. "I would have loved to have tasted her."

My eye twitches. My knee bounces once.

"And I see you prepared for the possibility that she was untouched." He nods at me, approving of me. "I probably would have let you keep her, Draco. Provided you let me have her first."

My fingers squeeze around the portfolio.

"Don't worry, son. I would have repaid your 5,000 galleons in return."

My shoulders snap and I hurl the folio at his head. He bats it away before it hits him and I stand, facing the back wall. I press the heels of my hands into my eyes. He couldn't get past my walls, so he found another way.

"You're out of practice, Draco! It used to be harder to break you." He chuckles, like we're playing a game I know the rules to. "I really only had one more in me. Something along the lines of 'do you think she'll ever moan for you after she's screamed for me?'"

"Enough." I shake out my shoulders and turn to find him grinning at me. "I've come to discuss my future, not the past."

"She came to speak at your trial. How did that make you feel?" He tilts his head to the side.

“In the portfolio, you will find alternative business models, if you don’t prefer the first—“

“And now you work together at the Ministry. Do you get to see her often?”

“This meeting isn’t about her, it’s about the business—“

“No, it’s about the inheritance. Which has to do with her.”

I take a shaky breath, and look at the ground. A sure sign of defeat. The jewelry box lid has cracked open.

“What’s to say you don’t run off with her once the money is in your accounts. How will I be able to guarantee the sanctity of my line, once I have signed away the money?”

“That’s not going to happen—“

“Why not? You almost threw it all away before—“

“Because rebuilding my reputation - this family’s reputation - is more important. Distancing myself as much as possible from *you* is more important to me.”

I watch as he remains still. *Still as the grave,* he used to tell me.

“I’ll need something more, Draco.” His mouth opens, his tongue flaps, but otherwise still. “Something you need to hear as well.” He sits forward, lecturing me as a six-year-old. “Why can’t you just run off with her?”

Wide eyes flicker through my mind. Looking at me over a Butterbeer glass, over a ledger book. Consuming me, running over my face, my lips, my hair. Her lips parting whenever she can’t breathe, whenever I look at her. The whisper of “goodnight, Draco” caressing my ear.

It wasn’t enough to pin a dream on.

“Because she wouldn’t have me.”

He checks my eyes, back and forth. He sits back, looks to the side, and places his thumb against his lips, thinking.

“When will operations begin?” he says. My heart beats.

“January 1st.”

“And when will you announce?”

“November.”

He nods at the table. “You can’t begin operations January 1st.”

I blink at him. “Why? It’s a new millennium. Perfect marketing and visibility.”

“Your mother’s New Year’s Eve party. It should be your launch party.”

I open my mouth to argue. I close it.

“You can *open* on January 1st,” he says, “continue lining up clients, lining up employees. But you won’t be able to begin operating until February at the earliest.”

I nod. His eyes pass over me, examining my expression, my tension. He looks to the side.

“I will release a *portion* of your inheritance to you, for start-up,” he says. I clench my jaw, counting my blessings. “The rest to be released January 1st.”

“Contingent on what?” I ask. There’s always a catch.

“Contingent on nothing, Draco,” he sings. “I just want to make sure that you’re truly serious about this business.” He leans back. “It’s an awful lot of money. I’d hate to see it… go to waste.”

Like before. When I almost traded it for her.

This business, or your Mudblood.

I swallow. He sees it. I circle back. “And what am I expected to do with this ‘portion.’”

“Why, Draco,” he says. “You won’t need *all* of the inheritance to secure your office space, your legal counsel, and to begin socializing with potential investors, partners, and employees.” His eyes twinkle and I know that he’s won. “And I won’t be stingy. For this start-up, I will release, oh, say…” His eyes dance on the ceiling, as if he’s calculating. Then grey eyes pierce me. “…35,000 galleons.”

My eye twitches. The corner of his mouth turns up.

“Yes, father.”

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for your response to this story! I'm glad you all find Draco's POV as interesting as I do. :)

A warning for this chapter and a lot of future chapters: References to Non/Con, torture, and "Auction-y" things here.

Thursday, February 1, 1996

Severus has been staring at me for fifteen minutes.

I know it's a test. I know he's probably reading me at this very moment.

But damn, I'm bored.

I've been coming to his office twice a week for the past month. I've been *meditating,* and clearing my mind three times a day per his instructions. We've built walls – literal walls. Last week I came in and there were bricks and mortar waiting for me. Two hours later I had made a three-foot-high brick wall.

But he hasn't mentioned the bloody jewelry box once. It still sits at the bottom of my trunk, hidden underneath spare robes and old parchment.

I don't take my eyes away from his. But I do start on my Ancient Runes essay. Mentally. Ten minutes later he finally speaks.

"I think you're thinking of late Egyptian. Not Scandinavian."

I blink, for what feels like the first time in half an hour. He lifts a brow at me.

"Congratulations, Draco," he says. "You failed your first test." He crosses his arms and swoops away from me.

My mouth opens and closes. I huff. “How did I fail if I didn’t know what the test was?”

“Do you think the Dark Lord will give you a warning before he searches your mind?” He warms a kettle by his desk. My cheeks warm with it.

“This is ridiculous.” I stand, grabbing for my school bag. “You haven’t taught me *anything!* You’re shit at this, you know that?” I spin on my heel, a move I learned from him and stomp to the door.

“Do you want to know what I learned while you were working on your Ancient Runes essay?”

“No.” I’m reaching for the handle on the door.

“Miss Granger drinks coffee, not tea.” This stops me, my back still facing him. “She laughs to herself more often than she laughs out loud.” I swallow. “She likes Sugar Quills. And while that revelation led me down a rabbit hole of dark fantasies I wish I’d never followed —“

“Stop.”

“—The fact remains that your mind is not as well prepared as you think it to be. Miss Granger is not safe as long as you remain incompetent.”

I spin back to him. “Safe?! How am *I* going to endanger her? She does a just fine job of that herself!”

He studies me. “He has plans for you, Draco. You must know.”

I blink at him. I pretend I do know. “And?”

“And your loyalty will be tested.”

I march back to him. “I am *loyal* to the Dark Lord,” I hiss.

“For Miss Granger’s sake, I hope so.”

I stare at him. The tea kettle whistles. He turns and pours himself a cup.

“Are you ready to begin again?” he asks.

The muscle in my jaw ticks. “I cannot comprehend the idea that the Dark Lord would spend hours searching my mind. Your lessons make no sense,” I seethe.

“It’s not about the *hours,* Draco. It’s about patience and training.” He sips his tea, and then sets it on his desk.

“Patience and training for *what?* You’ve told me nothing of that damned *jewelry box* or how any of this will actually help me –“

"*Legilimens,*" he whispers.

A bolt of light speeds towards me, and I throw up a brick wall in surprise.

It is blasted into pieces, crumbling and cracking.

I erase my mind, letting the anger drift. But he's pushing past the doors and opening locks and drawing things forward and suddenly I'm seeing something I've never seen before.

She's in front of me on a cobblestone street. I have my wand trained on her, and her eyes are wide. Her wand is on the ground. Explosions around me. I lower my arm, my heart beating. She takes a quick breath, grabs her wand, and runs.

*I'm in the ballroom at Malfoy Manor. The Dark Lord is before me, taller than I've seen him. And I realize I'm on one knee, like my father was. "You hesitated, Draco," he hisses. "They saw you. Tell me why." I look into his red eyes and lie and say I didn't, say she overpowered me. "**Legilimens,**" he screams, and he's diving into my memories and he sees my desires and he's breaking through walls, stretching me, looking for truth, and he finds her.*

I'm standing now, still at the Manor, and the Dark Lord's eyes are trained on the ground again. Someone else is at his feet. Someone with wild curls, and wide eyes, and she's screaming. The Dark Lord is laughing. Everyone is laughing. There's a crowd around me. "This will teach you, Mudblood," Voldemort cackles. "For seducing pure-bloods, twisting them to bend to you." She begs, and then screams again as lightning hits her. I look down and it's my wand.

"STOP!"

And I'm back in Snape's classroom, on my knees and sweating. My vision blurring, and I'm gasping for air.

I look up at him. He's sipping from his teacup.

"What was that? What did you do?" I gasp.

"That," he says, "was skilled Legilimency on an untrained mind."

I glare at him. His greasy hair swings as he turns to set down his teacup.

"This isn't basic Occlumency, Draco," he says. "If all you want is a quick fix for pesky, prying minds, then your father could help you with that." He looks down at me. I'm still on my knees. "This kind of Occlumency is for the moment you will look into the eyes of the Dark Lord, and lie." He watches me as I blink. "The moment you tell him that you are devoted to no one above him. And trust me," he says, tilting his head, "that day is closer than you think."

"I'm not *devoted* to her."

He looks down at me, and I see pity in his eyes. "Draco, it's not *me* you need to lie to."

I swallow and I feel acid burning my throat as I try to keep my dinner down. I hear her screaming still. I take a deep breath, clearing the nightmare from my mind, and stand tall. I level my eyes on him, and she's tucked away, safe behind stone and brick.

"Ready?"

He sits at his desk. I sit in the chair.

I let him stare at me for the next four and a half hours, without a thought in my brain.

~*~

Saturday, September 18, 1999 – later

I hear the click of the camera as I leave. I can't be bothered to lift my head. Skeeter can deal. She can spin it like she always does.

I take the Floo to the Leaky Cauldron. I can't face my mother yet.

I down a firewhisky and head to an owlery. I'm halfway through a note to Katya before I remember she is unavailable all weekend. I crush the note in my fist, clenching my jaw. I flip names through my mind. Who could I bear listening to?

I'm folding and sealing the note to Jacqueline when I realize that she's brunette with intelligent eyes and wide teeth, and I'm ripping that letter up.

I check my timepiece. It's after 5PM. I'm trying to get a girl to agree to dinner by 6PM. 7PM at the latest. A girl who will show the *Daily Prophet* readers that I don't have a type. Or a death wish.

I rub my forehead. Jeannette will have to do. She's blonde, French, and I know she'd drop everything.

I send the owl. I send another to Skeeter. And one to the restaurant maître d'. And I head back to the Leaky for another drink.

~*~

Sunday, September 19, 1999

"Oh," Mother says, looking at me over the top of the paper. "Did you know that today is Miss Granger's birthday?"

Yes. Of course, I do.

She continues, "Perhaps you could send her a card? Or bring her by something tomorrow at work?"

"No, Mother."

I feel her eyes on me, but I stare down at my toast.

~*~

Monday, September 20, 1999

"HERMIONE GRANGER AND RONALD WEASLEY IN LOVE AGAIN!"
by Rita Skeeter

I stare at the picture of Weasley leaning in to kiss her. Softly. Like she'll break.

I let myself watch it once more, then I close the paper. Mother's eyes are on me.

"I'm quite surprised. I thought Mr. Weasley had been out of the country," she says.

I stand from the table. "Not all that surprising." I look up at her and focus on releasing all tension in my shoulders. I know my eyes are dead when I say, "They've been in love for years, you know."

I leave the room. I grab my satchel bag from Mippy, and toss the Floo powder into the fireplace. I step into the Ministry Atrium and head to the lifts. The three persons sharing the lift with me talk animatedly, and I block them out. I don't notice that they're all going down to the courtrooms until the lift doors open in the dark hallways. I roll my eyes, waiting for them to step off and four more join. We head up and the doors open again at the Atrium.

Three people step in at the Atrium, including her.

My pulse doesn't jump. My eyes don't drift to her. My skin doesn't prick.

The lift stops at every floor along the way. She hasn't seen me. And I'm counting down the floors until she jumps off at 4.

And suddenly - "I'm not engaged! Stop looking for a ring!"

The whole group jumps. She huffs. A woman in blue blushes.

At Level 5, everyone steps off but her and one older man. She looks up, shyly. And her eyes widen as she sees me.

"Sorry," she laughs. "It's been a long day already."

I concentrate on the nothing I'm feeling.

"Obviously," I say.

She blushes. And jumps out at Level 4.

She still has the audacity to blush. A flicker of rage slicks its way through my veins. Kissing her childhood sweetheart. Fooling around with her co-worker. And *blushing* at me.

She's a right tease, she is.

My fingers twitch.

I can still smell her as the lift ascends.

~*~

Tuesday, September 21, 1999

Dear Draco Malfoy,

You don't know me, but I remember you. I went to Beauxbatons, but I was at Hogwarts for the Triwizard Tournament. I remember seeing you at the Yule Ball and –

And the letter explodes.

~*~

Wednesday, September 22, 1999

Goldstein thinks it's funny.

He's created an "application" for Lady Malfoy and has passed it out like a memo. He's threatened to send it out to the whole Ministry if I can't take the joke.

Potter finally has to step in, and tell Goldstein to knock it off before I snap.

I take it out on Potter instead.

~*~

Thursday, September 23, 1999

"What is the matter with you, Draco? You seem… off."

Katya dips her lettuce into her dressing, and lifts a brow at me.

I look at her. "I'm fine."

"You're not, but you don't have to discuss it, I guess."

"No, I don't. Our arrangement doesn't extend to our emotional well-being."

I stab at my lunch. She is still.

"Our arrangement can also *end* whenever it is no longer mutually beneficial," she says lowly. I swallow. "The photographer just arrived. Are you going to pretend to enjoy this lunch or shall we stage our breakup now?"

I take a deep inhale, feeling the air circle through my limbs, clearing my head.

I look into her eyes. “I’m sorry. I’ve had a hell of a week.” I smile at her, and she grins back. I hear a camera click.

~*~

Friday, August 22, 1997

Her face is on the front page of the *Prophet.* And my insides are screaming.

“MUGGLE-BORNS WANTED FOR INTERROGATION”

I’m late to meeting with Crabbe and Goyle. We’re off to Diagon Alley for school supplies, but her face staring up at me from the side table stopped me. And her name at the top of a list.

A low whistle to my left shocks me. I drop the paper and begin looking for my coin bag, about to leave.

“Who’s this pretty thing?”

I look over and Rowle is passing through our entrance hall from the dining room, from the breakfast *my* elves have served him. He grabs a newspaper off the side table, like he lives here. Which I guess he does. For now.

Dolohov enters behind him, and I’m fairly certain he would have washed his hair if the Dark Lord had been in town.

They had called Lord Voldemort back from a mission a few weeks ago when they’d located Potter at a café, only to return empty handed. They’ve been quite nasty to me since the Dark Lord requested my… “assistance” with their punishment for their failures.

I try to leave without being noticed, as they usually spit unpleasantness towards me, when I hear Dolohov say, “That’s her! That’s the bitch that Obliviated us!” He grabs the paper from Rowle.

“It is?”

“Yes, it’s the Mudblood that’s always with Potter.”

I turn to the fireplaces, ready to slip by.

“Wish we’d grabbed her when we had the chance!” Rowle says. “Now it’ll cost us galleons to have her.”

The back of my neck pricks.

“You don’t have the gold for her,” Dolohov laughs. “Starting bid is ten thousand.”

My hand pauses in reach for the Floo powder.

“We could have split her down the middle,” Rowle says. “In more ways than one!”

I turn back to them. My eyes are cool. My skin is tight.

“What are you idiots on about?” I say.

They turn to me. Dolohov snarls. “Do you make it a habit to eavesdrop, whelp?”

“When I’m in my own home, I do.” I lift a brow.

“What do you think, Malfoy?” Rowle grabs the paper back from Dolohov and suddenly I’m staring at her face again. “She pure? Or do you think Potter’s had her?”

I stare at them. I swallow. “What’s it to you?”

“It’s 5,000 more if she’s clean.” Rowle turns the paper back to himself and I watch his eyes dance over her face.

“She’s a Mudblood,” Dolohov says. “She can’t be that clean. What else are they good for?” My skin is buzzing when he looks up at me. “What do you think, Draco?” His eyes are dark. “You in? I’d say 10,000 each should cover her.”

“What’s the money for?” I almost snap.

Rowle looks up at me. “The Auction.”

My veins turn icy, but I keep my eyes even.

“Macnair thought of it,” Rowle continues. “Whoever gets rounded up once Potter and the Order are gone will get auctioned off. Mudbloods, blood traitors, anyone worth anything to anyone.”

“We trade her off every week, you think?” Rowle says, looking down at her picture again. I see him adjust his pants.

I wish I was back in the parlor, with my wand trained on them, Voldemort hissing in my ear to hurt them.

“Sorry, gentlemen,” I say. “I don’t share.” I toss the Floo powder into the fireplace. I disappear into the green flames, twisting away from their glaring faces.

Just before I pop through to Borgin and Burkes, I hear a shouted, “Save your sickles, Malfoy!”

It takes me a moment to step through the fireplace, lifting a hand to Mr. Borgin in greeting. I wander through Knockturn Alley, towards Crabbe and Goyle. I greet them. We walk.

As they ask me questions about what Voldemort has planned for us for the next year, I see wild hair on the floor, thrashing. Only it’s not the Cruciatus Curse she’s fighting.

~*~

Friday, September 24, 1999

"Malfoy?" His voice timid. "Er, would you like to head downstairs together?"

My eyes lift to see Potter, stepping back and forth on each foot, just outside my cubicle, like he's ready to run.

It's gone too far, really. All this Gryffindor business. After-work drinks and bettering the world. And now here's Potter, two days after I laid into him for sticking up for me, still trying to be my *friend.*

He pities me, the friendless Slytherin.

My eyes are cold when I say, "My testimony is after lunch."

His eyebrows lift. He stammers and stumbles his way out of my office.

Gryffindors are too weak. They are comfortable in their weakness.

After lunch – which I take alone – I head to the courtrooms. I am half an hour early, but at least I'm out of that bloody office.

I let my gaze drift to the stones below my feet. I clear my head. I imagine Severus, staring at me over his desk, searching for open doors.

The click of shoes coming from the lifts. I look up to see a familiar pair of hideous heels. I can't get a moment's rest from these people.

"Malfoy." She nods at me, like we're acquaintances.

"What are you doing here?"

"Providing information to the Wizengamot. Much like I assume you are?"

She's here to free Dolohov.

My jaw tightens. I have to look away from her. From her stupidity. I draw up the curtains on my memories before I play all of my old fears in front of my eyes.

Engaged to Weasley. Fooling around with O'Connor. Blushing at me. And taking pity on the rapists and murders.

"Tell me, Granger." The words are tumbling out of me before I even know where they are taking me. "Do you make it a priority to free all of the Death Eaters? Is 'Testify on Behalf of the Accused' a standing Friday appointment in your calendar?"

My eyes are empty as I look at her. She blinks at me, her lashes fluttering against her cheeks. I hear the whisper of *Good night, Draco,* and swat it away just before she speaks.

“Actually, I am testifying *against* the accused today,” she says. There’s a fire lighting in her eyes, and I feel heat boiling under my skin. She lifts a brow at me, like she’s ready for a fight. “Don’t worry, Malfoy, you’re still the exception to the rule.”

My stomach jumps. Like a teenager who’s just heard that his crush likes him. But that’s not what she said. That’s not what’s happening here.

You’ll have to decide what you want more, Draco.

“The exception,” I whisper, rolling it around on my tongue. To be her exception…

The image of Weasley’s lips on hers.

Her exception, but nothing more.

This business, or your Mudblood.

And it’s like the last stone has set, like something’s clicked into place. And all I can think is *Stay away from me, Hermione Granger.*

“And who asked you to *save* me, Granger?” I step towards her, and stop. “Because I didn’t ask for your pity. I don’t need a ‘champion.’” I spit the word at her like it’s dirty.

There’s heat on her cheeks again and her breathing shallow and she says, “I never volunteered to be your ‘champion.’”

I step into her and it’s like throwing myself off a cliff. “Then what is it you *are* volunteering for?”

Her chest flushes, and her eyes drift to my mouth before she stammers and blinks. Her chest heaves, pulling her blouse tight, and I wonder if she knows exactly what she’s doing behind that Golden Girl façade.

“So, is it a Life Debt, then?” I ask.

She narrows her eyes. “A Life Debt?”

“You saved me from a lifetime of rotting in Azkaban, so now I owe you, Granger? Is that how it works?”

But then I see her confusion and I know it’s not about a Life Debt at all. She’s looking down at her feet and trying to explain, and I feel a chill run through me as I realize.

It wasn’t pity. It wasn’t bargaining. Out of the goodness of her heart, she fought for me. She *believes* in me. And when she looks up at me from beneath her lashes and says,” If anything, Malfoy, a Debt is repaid,” I realize she thinks I’m worth the effort.

The exception.

And I feel bile in my throat at how foolish she is. The Brightest Witch of Our Age.

“I meant what I said at your trial. If you had identified us at the Manor—“

I hear her screaming. I hear my father’s voice - *weak for her.*

“Stop! Stop glorifying that night.”

She jumps and then studies me, like she’s waiting for me to apologize or return to normal.

“I didn’t give a fig about saving the world, or stopping the Dark Lord – or you and your idiotic friends for that matter!” I shove my hair away from my face, and try to breath, to calm my mind.

“I know you recognized me,” she says. “I know you saw me, saw Ron, and could have easily–“

Ah, yes. *Ron.*

“Handed you over to the Death Eaters?” I finish for her. “Would you have liked that Granger? Would it have cleared things up in your logical brain?”

She still thinks there’s something in me worth saving. It’s time to rid her of that notion.

“Do you even know what they’re capable of?” I step into her again, and I see her back land against the wall. “Dolohov? The Death Eaters?” She’s rolling her eyes at me and protecting her forearm. “Not Bella,” I continue. “The real Death Eaters.”

Her eyes sparkle up at me in curiosity, and it’s so tempting to stop myself from going further. To just reach up for her curls and say *but I wouldn’t have let them touch you.*

But I’m only an exception. So, I smirk at her like I have a plan.

“Some of them are completely sane, with logical brains and the ability to dream up a future where Harry Potter and the Order are defeated, and Lord Voldemort reigns. And what do you think happens to people like you in this world, Granger?”

“I get it, Malfoy. We all get tortured. We all die. All Muggle-borns get a matching ‘Mudblood’ carving –“

“All the Muggle-borns, yes. But not Potter’s ‘Golden Girl.’ Or his Weasley slag for that matter.”

There’s a fear in her eyes, and it’s real this time. Yes, this is who we’re supposed to be. And I pin her into the wall, like I’ve always wanted to, forcing her eyes on me, taking her air.

And I tell her about the Auction. Something I swore I’d never do.

But I’m doing the wrong things. I’m saying the wrong lines. She suggests that I would have sold her and I jump on it. She accuses me of planning to keep her in the dungeons of Malfoy Manor and I let her believe it. She throws out a number and I correct her. She shivers and I

press into her, digging for information about her purity, begging her to run crying and to never speak to me again.

I'm heaving in the air that she's pushing out, our mouths so close, and I don't know how I landed here, almost pressed against her. It's contrary to the words pushing past my lips and it was the wrong thing to do. So, I finish it.

"So, tell me, Granger. I've been curious. Had events played out differently last spring, could I be 35,000 galleons richer?"

The sting of her hand on my cheek finally stops me, just as firm as it had been all those years ago. And I wonder if I've done it. If she'll finally give up on me now. She's glaring daggers into me, but she's panting against my mouth and I think I'm leaning into her when I hear:

"Mr. Malfoy. They are ready for you."

She releases me from her spell, and I step back from her. She leaves, almost running.

Good.

I blink away the heat.

I let the portly man take my wand. I push my hair back and walk into the courtroom and try to look reformed. I don't let my gaze wander to the cage. I explain the memories I provided and I let them ask questions about Dolohov's temperament. Dolohov spits at my feet, and hisses, "Coward" at me.

"Thank you, Mr. Malfoy," says the redhead. "You've been very helpful today."

I almost laugh. I retrieve my wand. The stone hallway feels like a graveyard as I pass through it.

I step in the lift, and I remind myself that it was necessary. I will be no one's *exception.*

I don't think Severus would approve.

Coward.

The lift stops at the Atrium for others to join and I elbow my way out, heading for the fireplaces. My legs shake and there's a hollow wind in my ears.

Mother is just about to head out when I pop through the fireplace in our entryway. I feel my fingers aching to hurt something.

"How was the trial today?"

"Fine."

I pass her, my heart choking me as it grows in my throat. I'm about to head to my room to destroy it when I see the closed door at the end of the entry hall.

“Have the renovations begun?” My voice is tight.

“On Sunday—“

I pull the doors open and the ghosts of the past hiss at me. I can hear her screaming. The room has been cleared. The chandelier is repaired, glinting and hanging. And I slash my wand through the air and it crashes to the floor.

I can see Bella dragging her knife across her pale skin and I point my wand at the spot on the floor. It explodes.

Rubble flies and I see the disgust on her face as she tells me to stop, tries to turn away from me and I press her into the stone wall in the ministry hallway.

Coward.

The curtains are on fire.

I feel her hand against my cheek, soft at first, like she wants nothing else in the world but to touch me, and then it’s pain.

I hear screaming again as the glass in the windows shatter, bursting out to the gardens, and the bricks from the fireplace where I stood like a statue fly like magnets toward the hole in the ground. My throat hurts and I realize it’s me screaming. And I’ve fallen to my knees.

I set fire to the bricks as they coalesce into the burning vortex in front of me and I think I can still see her blood staining the stones under my knees.

I’m finished. I’m breathing slowly. A movement from the doorway, where I know my mother has stood watching the whole thing.

“Is she engaged?”

I laugh. How mundane.

I open my eyes to see a brick, burning with magic in front of me.

Burning bricks, set into a line at my feet, held together with electricity as they build.

I take a deep breath and stand. A wall of burning bricks built around her in a circle, like a tower in those fairy stories.

“It doesn’t matter.”

I turn and exit, passing my mother in the doorway.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Saturday, September 25, 1999

Flying is easy. Zipping through Bludgers and winding over jerseys. The gasp of the wind in my ears overpowering any whispers.

What *isn't* easy, is the ginger glaring at me before we take off. Or the way Potter glances at me after the ginger takes him aside.

I have to remind myself that we aren't friends when Goldstein talks about drinks after practice. I decline, and I see Potter's shoulders drop in relief.

I get out of there before the Weasley girl tries to scream at me.

~*~

Sunday, September 26, 1999

At least we win against Magical Games and Sports. Ginny Weasley finds a way to put it all aside for the match, because she passes to me when I'm open and I slide the Quaffle just past the Keeper at the last second.

Goldstein hugs me in mid-air, almost knocking me from my broom. I let myself smile. Just once.

Potter looks like he wants to talk to me as we're heading to the cabins to shower and change, so I just grab my things and exit – as much as I would love to let Potter see the scar he dug into me as I change my shirt.

I'm casting a quick *Scourgify* over myself as I reach the edge of the pitch, and I hear a voice from a small distance away, chanting, "Go! Go! Gryffindor! Go! Go! Gryffindor!"

I turn to glare at the voice, and find myself looking into familiar, laughing eyes. My feet stop.

Pansy.

She smiles at me, like it's only been days since we've seen each other. She looks older.

I wonder if I do, too.

I think of the letters and notes she wrote to me for those fifteen months, and the denied visitation requests.

“You look good in red, Draco.” She lifts a brow at me, and runs her eyes over my uniform.

We Apparate to a brunch place we used to go to in the summer before fifth year. Vincent used to order the French toast and the pancakes together and sit quietly eating next to Greg while Pansy, Blaise, Theo and I chatted. I blink.

“How’s the Ministry?” she asks, once we’ve placed our orders. “Are you on your way to becoming the next Minister of Magic?” She teases me under lowered lids as she brings her teacup to her lips.

“Hardly.” I stir in the honey. “It’s as you would expect. A desk job with several of my least favorite people in England.”

“How much longer do you have?”

“Eleven weeks.” They could not pass soon enough. “And you? You’re studying under Madame le Roux?”

“Ah, so you *did* receive my letters.” She pats her napkin against her lips, and lifts a brow at me.

I feel heat come to my cheeks. “I read them. I didn’t know how to respond.”

“Oh, come now, Draco.” She smiles. “I wanted to hear all about the exciting things going on with you. ‘Today I walked around my cell *counter*-clockwise instead of clockwise. Today I was kicked by only *one* guard!’”

I stare down into my teacup.

“Who else is working with you?” she changes the subject – one of her strong suits. “I saw Anthony Goldstein today, and a few others I recognized. But Ginny Weasley – isn’t she flying for the Harpies?”

“Mm-hmm. But she’s Potter’s girlfriend, so it seems she gets a free pass.”

“Hm. Just like a Weasley.” Pansy smirks, and we’re thirteen again, picking apart the weak and laughing. She finds my eyes and says, “Always reaching for the cream of the crop, especially when they’re unworthy.”

And suddenly we’re talking about a different Weasley, somehow. Another of her strong suits. I hold her stare, waiting.

“Who else works there, now?” She shifts in her chair, and I realize she’s been working toward this for several minutes now. Working toward *her*. Pansy is marvelous. But I swallow.

“Katie Bell.”

“Oo. Rough.”

“Some idiot named O’Connor. He was a Gryffindor.”

“I think I tripped him once.”

“A few older Ravenclaws are Unspeakables.”

“Naturally.”

“That Kingsley fellow is Minister—“

“What about Granger?” She sips her tea, watching me.

“She’s on the 4th Level. Magical Creatures.”

“Hm. Seems right. Do you have to spend much time with her and Potter?” She sets her teacup down. Barely a click.

“Potter, I do. He’ll bring me cases to research.”

“But not Granger?”

“No, we have no need to directly interact.”

“And indirectly?” There’s a smile tugging at the corner of her mouth. My fingers curl around the napkin in my lap.

“There’s no need for that either.”

“Hm,” she hums, and I’m looking down at my saucer when she says, “What a shame. You were always so fond of the indirect interactions.”

I can’t bring my eyes to her. My tea is too hot, but I let it burn me as I sip.

~*~

Saturday, October 7, 1995

“Don’t you want to find a classroom, Draco? It’s so cold in the hallway.”

“Shh. I’ll keep you warm.” I hum into her ear, pulling her against me. She laughs.

“What if someone catches us? Isn’t this Granger’s night for patrol?”

My hand stills on her hip. “Is it?” I kiss her neck. A small gasp escapes her. “Come on, let’s go down here.” I take her hand and pull her towards the hallway intersection.

“Don’t you want privacy?” Pansy digs her heels in, and I almost yank her forward. We’re going to be late. “I can’t do all the things I want to while we’re in the hallway, Draco.” She whispers my name against my ear and I give her a shiver for show.

“Really?” I say. “I can think of plenty of things I can do to you in the hallway.” I send her the smile that always works, and I drag her down the stones. I check my timepiece while she’s trailing behind me, and see that we should have three minutes. Unless she took a different route. Unless she’s early.

“Draco—“

I hush her with my mouth. I press her into the wall, and immediately slide my thigh between her legs. She squeaks and giggles. I hold her head still while I kiss her, opening her mouth, tilting her head, pouring my breath into her. She clutches my shoulders and I think I can hear footsteps.

My hands slide down, and round over Pansy’s backside. She gasps. I pull her against me, sliding her along my thigh, pressing higher and she moans.

I hear a gasp, from twenty paces away, just near the hallway intersection. I press my tongue into Pansy’s mouth again. I massage circles into her backside, and she’s grinding down on my thigh. Good girl.

There’s silence behind us. Pansy’s hands twist into my hair, and she pulls my head down to her neck. I pinch my eyes closed to keep from searching for her face as I attach to Pansy’s neck.

Where was the clearing of the throat? The indignant noise before she called my name?

A chill races through my veins when I realize that she’s watching. I bite down on Pansy’s neck and she gasps. I bring my hands to her face, kissing her mouth again as I let my palms wander down the front of her, grazing her chest and pressing against her stomach.

I want her to see this. I want her to know what I can do.

I hear quiet footsteps when I reach under Pansy’s skirt, and let my fingers dance toward her. She’s coming closer? Pansy groans, and I realize I’m snapping my hips against her.

I listen, hoping to hear her breathing, or the sound of her heartbeat. And the footsteps are getting softer.

I can’t help it. I lift my head, and turn to where she’s supposed to be. And there’s a figure disappearing down the other end of the hallway, curls bouncing, head turned down.

Like I’m not worth the effort.

“Draco?” Pansy whispers against my cheek, and I realize I’ve stopped. Stopped everything. I feel Pansy turning to follow my gaze and I snap my head to her, taking her mouth again.

She was about twenty paces from the end of the hallway. I wonder how loud Pansy can get in twenty paces.

~*~

Sunday, September 26, 1999 – later

Pansy chats about her new fashion line she hopes to build. I get to bounce ideas off of her for the consulting group. We don't talk about the war or Hogwarts or hallways. When we separate, she makes me promise to write to her. She'll be in France for the foreseeable future, and I wonder about running away to the vineyards again.

I pop through the fireplaces at the Manor, ready to head upstairs, bathe, and just lay in silence until dinner.

"Mr. Malfoy, sir!"

I stop. I turn. I glare.

Mippy is smiling up at me.

"Your mother is requesting you in the library, sir!"

I clench my jaw. "Thank you, Mippy."

As I walk down the hallway, I shake my shoulders out, trying to focus on the qualities of a loving son.

I knock lightly and push open the doors. "Mother, you wanted to see me?"

She's sitting delicately in her chair, teacup beside her. She beams with mischief when she sees me, which is not my favorite expression.

"Draco! Home already!"

She has plans. I refrain from rolling my eyes and I step in the room.

"Yes, I was out with—"

But there's a figure in the chair next to her, still as a stone and I lose all my words when I see her sitting there, ankles crossed, floral skirt, holding a teacup. Like she belongs perfectly.

Which I suppose she does.

And her hair is fucking *wrong* again.

Her eyes are huge and waiting, and I forget that we're not alone, and that the entire reason she's here is because Mother is *absolutely* insane.

Mother smiles at me, eyes bright. "Draco, dear." Sickly sweet. Who is she fooling? "I invited Hermione to tea today. Didn't I tell you?"

My jaw tightens. I think of the two of them, sitting for hours, talking about me. Mother forcing her to discuss our past and our time at the Ministry, and has she told Mother about Friday? About never wanting to see me again?

“No, you didn’t.”

“Please join us, Draco.” Not a request.

I’m about to ask Granger to excuse us so I can have a moment to scream, when she does exactly that. She stammers something about getting back to the bookstore, and I wonder how it is that she’s even here and not at work. She drops her teacup on the side table with such a noise that it rattles for minutes afterwards, humming in the room.

Mother frowns and talks about setting up another time for tea with her, and she’s practically shaking as she nods, standing and grabbing her bag.

Run, Granger.

“Draco, will you please escort Hermione the fireplaces?”

My jaw may break. My teeth grind against each other, and I’m about to snap for Mippy to take my place when she’s mumbling that she can find her way.

“Oh, nonsense,” Mother says. “It’s no trouble, is it Draco?” I’ve seen this look on her before. When I was much younger. She used to give me this look when I was about to embarrass her in front of her socialite friends.

I snap into the guise of someone with nothing to fear and nothing to hide and I open the library door for her. She turns to thank my mother and Mother is asking her to call her Narcissa. That I *do* roll my eyes at. My mother catches it as Granger turns to pass me, her scent blossoming in the air she passes.

I lead her to the fireplaces, concentrating on the destination and not the too-loud footfalls or the way I can feel the air move between us.

Just when I think I’m done. Just when I feel the air start to lighten, and the end is in sight, the elves – the usually silent elves – drop something in the drawing room. Her head turns, and she stares at the door.

I wonder if she knows where she is, and a spike of heat darkens my eyes when I think that Mother could have met her elsewhere.

I see her eyes on that door, her burning curiosity. And she needs to leave before she sees the chandelier crashed again and the hole in the ground where her body spasmed and the wrecked fireplace where –

“Renovations.” I hear myself.

I feel her eyes on me, so I offer her the Floo powder and she disappears, leaving only her scent behind.

I watch the fireplaces for a moment longer. Then I turn on my heel, and head for Mother.

I push the doors open, and Mother is reading contentedly, sipping her tea.

“She’s not engaged,” she says. She flips a page.

Something releases its grasp on my ribs. And I swallow.

“We had an argument on Friday, and I think it’s best if I stay away from her.”

Mother looks up at me, brow raised.

“What kind of an argument?” she asks, sly as a fox.

I don’t think Mother knows about the Auction. Being the wife of a Death Eater, she is no stranger to the crude and violent people that lived on her estate a few years ago, but I don’t want her to know what I would have done. How I would have kept her.

I blink away the thoughts. “It doesn’t matter now.”

I turn and close the library doors behind me.

~*~

Thursday, September 30, 1999

She’s been inescapable all week. I’ve joined her in the lifts, I’ve met her in the café, and now I’m working directly with her on a case.

Draco Malfoy
Analyst and Consult
Department of Magical Law Enforcement
Auror’s Office

Thank you for the detailed report on the incident regarding the dragon egg. The Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures would like as much information as possible on the physical attributes of the egg itself so that we may begin to identify the breed.

A response at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
Hermione J. Granger
Analyst and Research Assistant
Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures
Beast Division
Dragon Research and Restraint Bureau

I roll my eyes at her scratchy penmanship and civility.

I write back:

It was shaped liked an egg.

No formalities. No titles. No greetings. I smirk as I imagine her opening it, storming around her cubicle, demanding justice and competence.

It's already sent off when I realize that pulling an emotional response from her is the wrong thing.

I bite my cheek and wait.

~*~

Friday, October 8, 1999

"Draco." Mother's voice stops me as I stand from the breakfast table. "I request that you be at home tomorrow evening. Please cancel any plans you may have with… Katya."

She hisses the Slavic name like it's disgraceful against her tongue.

"Alright," I say. No point in arguing over plans I don't have with a girlfriend who's not mine. "What scheme do you have planned, Mother?" I bring my teacup to my lips and finish my tea.

"Hermione is coming over tomorrow."

I cough. I grab at my napkin and pat my chin before the tea stains my robes. She's smiling. She timed it, hoping I would choke.

"What are you playing at?" I hiss at her.

"Nothing, dear," she says. "I made a new friend and I'd like to keep her."

"Then why do I have to be there?" I hiss. "I really should be seen out with companions on Saturday evenings –"

"Should the three of us go out then?" She smiles at me.

I frown back. "*Suitable* companions." My blood heats thinking of being photographed with her. Sitting at a table with a white cloth and wine glasses while Mother chats and approves and the world sees a happy family, and all my father sees is betrayal. And weakness.

"I can't think of a better companion for your reputation," Mother says. She begins to put jam and clotted cream on her scone. "Skeeter would be ecstatic, don't you think?"

I'm tempted to make her choke on her scone, as she made me choke on my tea, but I decide to speak before she takes a bite.

"Father wants me to stay away from her if I am to receive the inheritance before I marry."

Her butter knife stops its journey to the jam. And my mother, snapping her head to me, eyes dark with fury, says, “Poppycock!”

I chuckle. There are moments when I find my mother so precious. And I feel if I don’t laugh, I’ll scream.

“He said that to you?” she demands.

I nod, and look at the stone beneath my feet. “He gave me a portion of my inheritance to work with until the new year. But the rest would only be released if he was sure I remained focused.”

I watch as she rolls her eyes and smooths her napkin on her lap.

“Well, what your father doesn’t know, won’t hurt him.” She pops the bite of scone into her mouth and chews.

“Perhaps just the two of you should have dinner. Like I said, we had an argument…“ I swallow and blink away the sight of her watery eyes as I asked her if I could have bought her virginity back then. “I said all the right things to make her hate me.” I look up to my mother. “She won’t agree to dinner.”

“She already has.” Mother lifts her brows at me. Mine pull together.

What game was Granger playing.

“There didn’t seem to be anything out of sorts the last time she was over,” Mother continues. “She was perfectly happy to visit, and even talk a bit about your shared time at Hogwarts.” My eyes snap to her while she smirks and brushes the jam with little flourishes. “Perhaps, you’re not as *evil* as you think, Draco.”

She pushes the scone past her lips and grins at me.

“Or perhaps, she’s a fool,” I say.

I turn to leave and head to work.

~*~

Saturday, October 9, 1999

I take afternoon tea with Noelle Ogden. I’ve seen her at holiday parties over the years, but we’ve never had an opportunity to really get to know each other. She’s several years older, and currently at a Muggle university in the States, so we catchup on a few things.

I bring up the consulting group, and begin opening doors for asking to sit down with her father.

I stay out past dinner time. I’ll deal with Mother’s wrath later.

I finally pop through the fireplaces just past eight, and prepare myself to run into her while she's leaving. Silence in the hall.

I wander towards the western dining room, ready to join them if they're still eating. I turn the corner and Mother is sitting, reading a book at the table.

"She didn't show?"

She looks up at me, displeased. "She did. She's in the library, browsing."

"Suddenly we're a used book shop?" I shoot at her. She glares back at me. "I'm sorry I missed dinner, but –"

"You didn't." She smiles at me. "Will you please check on our guest?"

I frown. "You waited for me for dinner?

"I didn't," she says, flipping a page in her book. "Hermione had errands to run as well." She looks up at me with a wide smile, and three place settings appear on the table. "Perfect timing, really."

I stomp out of the dining room, feeling like knocking something over on the way out. I trudge to the library and when I open the doors and cannot immediately see her, I realize I'll have to search for her, like a fucking servant.

She's not far from the main stacks. Her back is to me, and her hair is down, falling past her shoulders. I'm tempted to knock my knuckles on the wooden stacks as a hello, but this is *my fucking library* and she has no *fucking business* being here. I'm about to say something prickly, that will hopefully make her jump, when I see that she's juggling several books in one arm. She's got one open on her elbow, reading the Table of Contents, and she's balancing the rest against her hip and chest.

It's all very nostalgic. I swallow. I remember seeing her this way in the Hogwarts library, never pausing to set anything down and never levitating.

I conjure a basket. I clear my throat. I clear my head.

She jumps and her eyes grow round when she sees me. Her cheeks flush, and I hope I'm still frowning at her.

When she sputters out that she's just borrowing books, I realize I shouldn't be giving her a basket. She should have to fumble these books all night. Through dinner even.

"I know," I say. I step closer to her, and twirl the basket between my fingers. "I told my mother that she was foolish to think that you would be able to carry your selections out with you without the aid of a small sled. So she sent me to give you this."

I extend the basket to her. My insult didn't come out nearly insulting enough. I can tell because she's watching me closely as she takes the basket from me, and breathing deeply. I let her organize the books, and I'm just two steps away from her, breathing her in.

“My mother would like you to join us for a late dinner.”

And just as I suspected, she has no idea about staying for dinner.

“What? It’s half past eight!”

“Yes, that’s why they call it a ‘late’ dinner, Granger.” A fire lights behind her eyes as I talk down to her, and I try to refocus on the matter at hand. “The table is already set for three. She is waiting on us.”

She stutters, and tries to say she’s not hungry, and the blush on her neck is distracting me as I tell her dinner is not optional.

“Just because you are unable to say ‘no’ to Mummy, doesn’t mean no one else can,” she snaps. “I will apologize to her directly and decline.”

She sticks her nose in the air and something clicks into place inside of me.

I grab her arm as she tries to walk around me.

“Look, you silly bint.” I wait for her face to turn up to mine, and there’s something burning inside of her. “You have chosen to befriend my mother and pester my household—“

“To clarify, she chose me—“

I cut her off, squeezing the flesh of her arm just a bit tighter. “And for whatever reason, she has invited you to dine with her this evening, going out of her way to eat later in the evening so she could fit into your *busy* schedule—“

“I tried to come over *after* dinner!” she screeches. She’s taking shallow breaths, eyes flickering back and forth between mine.

“—So I don’t know what your intentions are for being here, haunting my library, and playing house with my mother—“

“I find your mother to be a wonderful conversationalist, a generous host, and all-around lovely person. It’s a shame those genetic traits ended with her.”

My skin is searing where I have my fingers wrapped around her. She is glaring up into my face, insulting me like she used to, and it would be so easy to push her against the shelves and taste her – give her imprints on her back.

Something crosses her face, and she pulls her arm back, breaking our eye contact. And I miss everything.

She marches out of the library, with theatrics that I remember from school. I follow silently, and smirk as she goes the wrong way out the doors. I lean against the doorframe and try to look smug.

“Granger.”

She turns and glares at me as I gesture toward the right. She huffs and lets me lead her through the house. I hear her slow several times, and when I look over my shoulder I see her looking at the art on the walls, and even once stopping dead to take in the sunset through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

I wonder if she likes it. The Manor.

I blink and keep moving, hearing her catch up.

Mother smiles as we enter the small dining room, and when I take the basket from her arm, she looks suspicious. I pull her chair for her and she looks suspicious. I sit down across from her and she looks suspicious.

My mother encourages her to take the entire library home with her, and I watch as she smiles easily at her, and I look down at the table cloth. It's white. It's blank. It holds no memories or feelings.

I breath into its emptiness.

"I almost took the signed copies of the Lance Gainsworth series to read again, but your mother was telling me how much you love them, Draco. I'd hate for you to part with them."

Like ice water poured down my back, and fire licking my front all at the same time.

Draco.

I meet her eyes.

She sends me a mischievous smile that reminds me far too much of my Mother's, and I focus on what she's saying about the books before I even comprehend she's found my Gainsworth series.

I grimace back at her. "That was very kind of you, Granger." And I can see that Mother is quite pleased with herself. "And which books *are* you leaving with tonight?"

She frowns at my accusation of stealing our books, and continues to speak directly to my mother. The concept of blocking her out is infinitely harder when her voice is floating through the room, and I try to focus on the way her tone swings up on words to a pitch that is almost annoying.

The first course appears on the table.

My breathing is even. My eyes are taking her in. And my hands are steady.

Just in time for Mother to bring me back into the conversation.

"Draco, you've heard about Hermione's Gringotts project, yes?"

"I can't say that I have."

She starts on her pitch. Something about the dragon at Gringotts. When she's done with her story, I see her look down at the soup, and catalogue the spoons. She quickly glances to my mother to see which spoon she's selected.

It's abhorrent. Not precious.

"And you think the goblins will be willing to do things a different way?" I ask, and I'm almost certain she watches my soup spoon meet my lips.

Her eyes flip away and she says, "I think negotiation is always possible."

I laugh. The most non-negotiable person I've ever met…

"I've worked with them personally several times over the past months. They are not amenable to wizarding changes."

She's dipped her spoon in the soup by now. I wonder how her lips will look, pouting around the utensil. Or maybe because she's not been trained, the spoon will disappear between her lips –

I blink.

"Then we will have to make them see—"

"You can't make a goblin see anything." I cut her off. She's forgotten about her spoon and maybe I can too.

"The Ministry will be able to mandate laws that will force the goblins to comply," she says. Her cheeks begin to blush and I feel an answering response in my own. There's a flicker behind her eyes and I want to see it spark, so I use the precise word to set her off.

"So you think goblin rights should be subordinate to wizards law?"

Her eyes widen and her jaw drops and my chest is warm. I'm smiling before I can stop myself.

"I said no such thing-" And I cut her off again, speaking just close enough to the truth that it will set her off.

"The negotiations will only work if you get what you want, is that right Granger?" I relax back against my chair, and watch as she blinks rapidly at me, and I can feel her hand against my cheek again—

"Draco."

I had forgotten Mother was here at all. An excellent cool down.

She puts her spoon down. "The only thing I *want* is for no further harm to come to magical creatures by Gringotts' hands. There is a better solution out there, and I want wizards and goblins to agree upon it."

I notice she hasn't taken a bite of pumpkin soup yet, and perhaps she shouldn't. She doesn't deserve it.

"Maybe it *is* the best solution, Granger," I say lazily. "Maybe you're not the first person to start this fight, only to find that keeping a dragon in the bowels of Gringotts is the best security method there is."

I look at the tablecloth, the soup bowl, anywhere but her. Like she's inconsequential.

"It must not be the best method if three seventeen-year-olds were able to free it and ride out on its back last spring," she snaps, and when I look at her she's burning, glaring directly into me, and I think of us fighting like this without a table between us. Sparring in the bedroom maybe. Maybe she'd still be arguing with me while on her back, my hands opening her blouse. Still glaring at me, fighting over something we said at dinner.

"Mippy!" My mother is still here. She asks the elf for wine.

I watch her look at my mother, smile apologetically, and try to pick up her spoon again.

Oh, no you don't, Granger.

"Of course, getting down into the lower vaults required a bit of mischief if I remember correctly," I say, picking right back up. "The three seventeen-year-olds first used Unforgivables to pass through the first layers of security. So maybe it's not the dragon at all that failed."

Her eyes on me again, and I almost sigh. Mother tries to offer her wine and she declines.

"So, you're saying" – I see her crack a knuckle – "keep the maimed and tortured dragon downstairs, and beef up the upstairs security? That will solve the problem with the maim and torture."

I don't even know what we're talking about anymore. All I know is that she's not allowed to eat her soup, and she's not allowed to look away from me.

"Draco? Wine?"

"No, Mother." My eyes are focused in on her, and I feel the rest of my vision start to blur. "I'm just saying that the fault you find in the security is based on the ability to get past the dragon, but they would not have been able to get past the dragon without a bit of law-breaking upstairs." I pick up my spoon again, and smirk. "You might want to keep these arguments out of your presentation, Granger, else they decide to investigate further."

Mother is still talking about wine. I'm trying not to smirk. And Granger has abandoned her soup.

"Oh, thank you, Draco, but the Wizengamot already knows every detail of that situation," she hisses. I bring my spoon to my lips again, feeling perfectly content. "See, *I'm* perfectly capable of staying out of Azkaban all by myself, without the aid of a *champion*."

I freeze. Oh, you haughty little bitch.

I look up at her, ready with some kind of comment, and I see the heat leaving her eyes as she pulls her napkin off her lap, blushing across her face and chest.

I watch as she excuses herself, as she apologizes to my mother, as she looks mournfully at the soup.

Where are you going, Granger? We're just getting started.

She's standing and Mother is begging her to stay.

I imagine forcing her to stay. Tying her to her chair and taunting with that soup, pouring it down her throat while I make her moan with my other hand –

Mother is still talking and I blink. She's suggesting that I walk her out and I'd really prefer not to stand right now.

She scoffs. Says she'd rather get lost in the house than have me walk her.

I watch her as she ignores me, saying goodbye to my mother and fleeing the dining room. My heart is still thundering and the blood is still rushing downwards thinking of her angry face and her heated eyes and how much I'd like Mother to excuse us while I ravish her on top of the dining room table, soup spilling onto the tablecloth—

"Well, Draco," Mother whispers. "I hope you're happy."

It's supposed to be condescending. It's supposed to be sarcastic.

My lips lift. It the first time in two weeks that I've felt anything other than cold.

"Indescribably." I laugh. I stand, moving to leave.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm showing our guest out," I say innocently. Mother rolls her eyes at me.

Mippy appears, looking nervous, saying, "Miss forgot her books!" I take them and head toward the fireplaces. The books are monstrously heavy, so I cast a feather-light charm. I'm approaching the entry hall when I hear a whispered *"Accio Floo powder!"*

I smirk, and she hears me coming. She crosses her arms over her chest and I keep my eyes on her face. She's still glaring, so when I hand her the books I lift the weightless charm, and her eyes darken when she's done fumbling her books.

She's heaving in air through her nose, pressing her lips together and her chest is moving against the books. I flick my wrist and the Floo powder appears. She rolls her eyes and tries to reach for it. I pull it away.

I consider lifting it above our heads, watching her jump for it. Maybe she'll drop the books and press against me, grabbing my shoulders.

"Mother's quite upset, you know," I say. "After the scene you've made, I hope this is your last visit to Malfoy Manor."

She glares daggers into me, and I see the light in her eyes again.

"Oh, fuck off, Draco."

She grabs the Floo powder, and disappears.

I don't know what's gotten me harder: the obscenity, or the third "Draco" from her lips in one night.

I'm still standing at the fireplaces. I should go back and apologize to Mother. Finish dinner with her. I head upstairs and close my bedroom door, and let myself think of Hermione Granger's thighs on either side of mine, my hands wound in her hair, her lips whispering "Draco" against my neck.

It's the first time I've let myself think of her in two weeks.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

So glad to hear the positive responses for this story so far! Very excited to give you a few treats in this chapter. ;)

Monday, October 11, 1999

I have to work with her on Monday morning for the dragon egg project. I'd had a moment of brilliancy on Friday afternoon, and Robards asked me to prepare for a staff meeting early in the week.

I get in a few hours early to start, and he's at my cubicle, asking about that meeting. It's ambitious of me, but I tell him I'll be ready for a 9:30AM start. I scramble together the maps and the research I started on Friday, and begin spinning them into something resembling a report.

I'm in the conference room on Level 2 – my second office, I've named it – when several other staff members begin filing in, and suddenly she's there, looking directly into my eyes.

My visions of her face from last night swim in my mind, looking into me while I thrust into her, her lips pulling into a tight circle as her neck stretches, reaching for something, and I'm pulling her hair to get to look back at me –

She looks away and takes a seat as far from me as possible. I see O'Connor pull her chair for her. Oh. He's here too.

I refocus my energies on this staff meeting that I'm completely unprepared for.

And just as I had feared, she's asking questions. She's raising her hand like the good little Gryffindor she is, and I wonder if she *knows* what she's doing, sitting there with her back straight, like this is potions class and she's trying to get a *rise* out of her teacher.

By the end of the meeting I'm able to get in a "Ten points to Gryffindor."

She scowls and I think today will be a good day.

~*~

Wednesday, October 13, 1999

I have a meeting with Rita Skeeter to discuss the beginnings of Malfoy Consulting Group. She comes over for dinner, and I get the impression that every time Rita enters Malfoy Manor, she is living her best life.

Slimy, ladder-climbing roach.

Mother sits at the head of the table, quiet and letting me take the floor. I appreciate her so much.

"I'd like to announce on November 1st," I say, as the first course appears on the table, and after I've detailed my five-year-plan. "And I'd very much like to give you an exclusive interview, for the November 1st *Prophet*."

Skeeter's greedy eyes wander my face as she tears into her bread roll.

"I'd be honored, Mr. Malfoy." She winks at me.

I smirk back at her.

It's always strange, remembering that women find me attractive. I didn't have a mirror for fifteen months, and things start to become less important in Azkaban… I've been focusing for so long on different ways to get what I want, that I have forgotten the most basic of techniques.

I use my thumb to brush away imaginary mushroom soup from the corner of my mouth, and watch as her eyes follow the movement, dipping my thumb between my lips and sucking the nothing off it. Her eyes sparkle behind her glasses.

"What about your love life, dear?" She dips her spoon in her soup bowl. "Who is on your social calendar this weekend?"

I blink. I should have remembered that Skeeter prioritizes her job higher than any personal wants. Admirable.

As I have *no* social commitments this weekend, I choose the easiest response.

"I believe I'll be seeing Jeannette DuPont again on Friday evening." I flip my napkin on my lap, and make a mental note to contact Jeannette. "Location pending, but you'll be the first to know."

She gleams at me. "And are you going to be seeing more of Miss DuPont? Perhaps she'll be meeting your mother soon?" Rita glances at Mother and I hear an unladylike snort into her soup.

“You know I don’t play favorites, Rita.” I let my voice move like silk, hooding my eyes at her.

“You *have* been seen most often with Katya Viktor,” Skeeter said. “And I know that Miss Viktor’s father is in total support of the… relationship.”

“Our families have been friends for a long time,” Mother says. I think she’ll say more, but she returns to her soup.

“Yes,” I say. “Katya and I have a very special friendship.” I let the words hang in the air, letting Skeeter interpret them in any way she wants.

“Will you be seeing her this weekend as well? Surely Draco Malfoy can handle more than one date per weekend.” Skeeter winks at me again.

My lips part, ready to make up two other scheduled dates.

“We will be sitting down to lunch with Hermione Granger on Saturday.”

The words are like ice against my neck, and I snap my head to look at Mother, finding Skeeter doing the same.

She’s sipping from her soup spoon, like she hadn’t just shattered the thin glass I’d been walking on for months.

“Hermione Granger?” Skeeter slides her eyes to me, and they’re wide and clawing. “I had no idea you were so well acquainted, Narcissa.”

I feel like a fish, gasping for air outside of the river. And I realize that whatever Skeeter is reading from my face will make it into the *Prophet.* I close down, blinking, and refocus on Mother, who is patting her lips with her napkin.

“She works at that lovely bookshop in Diagon Alley. Draco and I have been going there for years, and we were so pleasantly surprised to find Miss Granger working there.” She smiles. “And of course, Draco has gotten to know her much better from working at the Ministry together.”

I have no idea what Mother is doing, but I know I need to stop it.

“Yes, there are several people I’ve become reacquainted with since starting at the Ministry.” I pick up my soup spoon, and find my hand shaking. “Harry Potter and I might even be what you call ‘friends’ now. He’s asked me to play on their interdepartmental—“

“And around what time did you say the three of you would be having lunch on Saturday?” Skeeter asks Mother. And I know I’m in deep when not even the mention of Harry Potter has Skeeter’s head turning.

“Just the two of them, I’m afraid.” I sit back, and let my spoon clatter against the bowl. The soup disappears. “I have other engagements this Saturday. But my mother and Miss Granger wish to continue their… acquaintance.”

“Oh, but Draco will, of course, be able to stop in. Your business is already in Diagon Alley, isn’t it dear?” My mother’s eyes are cool, and I don’t know how to argue with her here.

Skeeter’s eyes are flipping between the two of us like following a Quaffle. “And how long have you and Miss Granger been developing your… acquaintance, Narcissa?”

I open my mouth, and Mother beats me to it.

“A few weeks now. She was at the Manor for dinner just last weekend, in fact.”

And it’s like a door has been opened that cannot ever be shut.

I stare at my mother, innocently finishing her soup. Skeeter has lost her appetite in favor of a different kind of hunger. And I watch as her eyes burn and move quickly, like there’s a quill moving in her mind.

I try to think of what to say. A way to turn this around. To deny the explosion of facts in Skeeter’s brain. To make her forget all the old customs of pure-blood courting and to ignore the clear evidence in front of her.

Skeeter turns to me. “Well, that’s lovely. I think it would be very positive for public opinion to know that your…” – her eyes dance – “…*tastes* have changed, Draco. No matter whose acquaintance she is.”

I swallow.

“I’m thinking…” Skeeter lifts her eyes to the ceiling, calculating. “A Sunday morning print feature.” She taps her chin. “We’ll get a few shots of you and Miss DuPont of course. But if we can see you taking your tea with Hermione Granger, maybe drop a line or two about your future business plans, a bit of a ‘something’s brewing’ tease…”

“I couldn’t agree more, Rita,” Mother says. “I think a friendship with Hermione Granger could bring great things down the line.”

I stare at my place setting until the second course arrives.

After dinner, I walk Skeeter out. I kiss her hand smoothly before she disappears into the fireplace. I return to my mother, finding her in the library.

“Perhaps I wasn’t clear.” My voice is tense. “Father will deny me my inheritance if I don’t stay away from her.”

She pulls her teacup from her lips. “Is that what he said? The exact words?” She looks up at me and waits.

“’This business or your Mudblood.’” It’s a difficult sentence to say aloud. And I don’t know when the last time was that I used that word. It feels different on my tongue.

She chuckles. “Oh, so dramatic…” she whispers into her teacup. Then up at me, and louder: “Have you made an offer of marriage to Miss Granger?”

I feel my ribs rattle in my chest. “No, of course not,” I scoff.

“Then I see no reason for these ‘terms’ of his to be broken. You are moving forward with your business operations as planned, clearly *choosing* it.”

“And what would ‘public lunch with my mother’ fall under, but ‘moving forward?’”

“Like you said, Draco.” She smiles. “She’s my friend, not yours.”

I huff. “I don’t…” I run my hand through my hair. “I don’t want to ruin this, Mother.” She looks at me curiously and I clarify, “The business plan,” before she can assume I meant anything else. “I don’t want to anger him and jeopardize my future.”

She sets her teacup down, stands from her chair, and moves toward me. “Draco.” She places her hand on my shoulder. “Now that you’re an adult in this family, you *will* have to learn how to play your father’s games, yes.” She quirks her lips at me. “But you can always make up your own rules.”

She squeezes my shoulder, and heads up to bed.

~*~

Saturday, October 16, 1999

I am to retrieve a book for my mother, and retrieve a Golden Girl for lunch.

She sends me ahead with a look that brokers no arguments. I am to arrive at Florean Fortescue’s with Hermione Granger on my arm, or die trying.

I force myself to remember that any press is good press as long as the Dark Mark isn’t floating in the sky above Fortescue’s by the end of the day. Mother is right. A friendship with Granger will only help.

I’m about to open the door to Cornerstone, when I realize I’m frowning at the cobblestone street. I have to be approachable. Honest. Kind. And I am none of those things around her. I knock down a wall of bricks, and open the door.

She’s scribbling something down, leaning on the counter, and she’s got on her damned denims and a low-neck top. Or least it seems low-neck, as she pushes her chest towards the front door.

I walk up to the counter, trying to remember what it was I had planned.

She looks up at me, smiling, and then the smile drops off her face.

“What.”

Of course.

“’What?’ Is that how you greet customers here?”

She stands tall, and I see that her top isn't that revealing after all. Just my rampant imagination.

"Are you here for the reserved book?" she says, and my mind runs.

Yes, and lunch.

You look hungry.

I'm here to drag you to Fortescue's.

I end up nodding my head, waiting for a better moment. She frowns at me and retrieves the book from the shelf behind her. As she makes markings in her ledger book, I try to find the right words. I've asked loads of girls on dates. But this isn't a date. This is a publicity scam, so that the world will think that –

"Have your tastes changed, Draco?"

She pulls the words right out of my mind. And I stare at her as she smiles at me.

Draco, again.

She gestures to the book she's holding. It's got a pink cover. Of course, Mother would make this difficult.

"Oh, it's... not for me," is all I can mumble.

"Oh, alright." Like she's disappointed she can't tease me about the book. And suddenly the book is in a bag and the bag is held out to me, and her eyes are saying goodbye.

But I haven't even brought up lunch yet.

"Does Cornerstone do gift wrapping?"

She blinks at me. She mumbles something and blushes as she takes the bag away. She clears the ledger and reaches for the wrapping paper. And there I am, on the counter. She'd been reading the *Prophet* earlier that day. And she'd left the page open to my date with Jeannette.

Or perhaps it's a coincidence. And she has no emotional attachment to seeing me out with a beautiful French girl.

She turns back to the counter, and she pauses when she sees the article laid open like that. Spots of pink high on her cheekbones.

Not a coincidence. My blood heats. Does she possibly have even the slightest interest in my social life?

I watch her put the paper away and start to lay out the wrapping paper. I only have a number of seconds before she taps her wand and the edges fold and the tape floats over.

"My mother and I are stopping for a quick lunch at Fortescue's."

It’s quick. Factual. But not a question, I realize.

"Oh. Tell her I say hello?"

And strangely, she’s folding the paper herself. She centers the book in the wrapping paper, meeting the edges, taping them shut. How odd.

"Does Mr. Hindes come downstairs to cover your lunch?" I say, as her fingers work over the paper. I’ve never seen someone wrap a gift without magic.

"Yes, usually around one."

She’s distracted by the work her hands are doing, so I take the plunge. “Would you like to join us for lunch?”

She fumbles with the wrapping paper, and looks up me. I try to keep my expression open.

“Your mother wants a repeat performance of last Saturday? In public?” she teases, and looks away from me.

“If there's pumpkin soup, I promise to let you eat it.”

She smiles, like pumpkin soup is forever a joke between us now. And maybe it is. She’s working with a ribbon, making the gift beautiful, and I’m thinking of how no one should have to tear this wrapping apart.

“Tell your mother that I appreciate the invitation, but I'm too busy here today. It was nice of her to offer.”

I look around the store. There’s two people sitting in chairs in the corner. And I’m a bit peeved that she thinks my mother invited her. Even though… she’s right.

“I'm the one offering, Granger.”

“We both know who sent you, Malfoy.”

Malfoy.

She drops the wrapped book into a Cornerstone bag, and reaches it out to me. I’ve failed. Why would she go anywhere with me after the way I’ve treated her.

The door behind her opens and the shopkeeper Morty is interrupting us before I do something stupid, like tell her how much it would mean to me to take her to lunch.

His eyes brighten at the sight of me. I shake his hand. He’s still fond of me. Something that pisses Granger off.

And as she grumbles into the ledger book, and Morty's eyes twinkle at me, maybe the best way to Hermione Granger is not through her at all.

"I was just here to see if Miss Granger would accompany me for lunch today. My mother is just down the street."

Morty's eyes grow wide, and he says, "Oh, lovely! Yes, please do. I've got the shop." And suddenly she's being pushed from the counter even as she fights him.

"You're too kind, Mr. Hindes," I say. And he has the audacity to wink at me as Granger stomps towards the door I'm holding for her. And I wonder if he remembers the way my eyes would drift to her when I would lay in the loft, reading during the summer.

I follow her out, feeling quite victorious.

"Well, congratulations, Malfoy," she snaps. "You have a lunch companion."

"Oh, I'm just so glad Morty could cover your lunch," I drawl at her, rolling my eyes. "You looked swamped in there."

We walk toward Fortescue's. And it's silent. And I'm aching for the bustle of Diagon Alley proper, instead of this damned side street. We finally make the corner, and I feel her stop next to me. A few older women with shopping bags cross in front of us, and I step off the curb, guiding her forward, and she jumps. I realize my hand is on her back, and I drop it as she averts her eyes from me, feeling foolish for touching her.

We turn the corner and there's my mother. The height of fashion, ready to be featured in the *Prophet.* She's wearing a fucking hat for Merlin's sake.

"Your mother certainly knows how to make a statement," she muses. We approach the gate, and I realize Mother has chosen a table closest to the street so that all passersby can see, and a better view for the photographer.

I hold the gate open for her as we enter the patio. "You have no idea."

I watch as my mother greets her, and I can't help but notice the true smile on her face. Mother gestures to the chair across from her, and I pull the chair for her. She stares at me like she had at dinner, then sits.

I hurry inside to order our drinks and a plate of scones. And think of skipping out instead.

I return to the table and Mother is muttering some nonsense about needing more honey for Granger's tea so I respond, "Granger drinks coffee."

The table is still. It's a mistake, to be this familiar. So, I finish with a quip about putting honey in her coffee.

"I – yes, I do drink coffee more often." She looks up at me before I sit next to her. "Thank you."

She looks away before I can reply.

I go about fixing my tea. The two of them talk. The waiter delivers the scones. And I find moments of time where I'm frozen and can't look away from her lips. She licks the coffee from her mouth after every sip, and though this is something I'm already aware she does, it makes it more difficult to look elsewhere when I'm this close to her and not across the Great Hall.

Mother will interrupt my staring for a question or an opinion, and I get the feeling she's aware of my compulsion, saving me from embarrassing myself.

Is this what it's like to live without Occlumency? This hopeless surrender to what you want?

The conversation has been perfectly light, perfectly non-intrusive. So, I should have known Mother was only just warming up.

"Hermione, dear, I'd love to meet your parents the next time they are in England," she says. Granger chokes on her scone, and I have to glare at my mother. She ignores me.

Could she be anymore obvious?

Granger looks down at the table as she spouts some nonsense about the holidays being busy for them.

She's lying.

I watch her as my mother pries, as Granger's fingers twist around the napkin, as she picks up the butter knife and puts it back down and picks it up again.

"We had to erase their memories two years ago, before… everything began. They live in Australia together, with no memory of me."

There's a hollow wind in my ears. She continues. She talks about the little ways she's kept tabs on them. Her eyes are empty.

And I'm running up a flight of stairs, two at a time, bursting through a bedroom door, spinning and breathing and crumbling.

My mother grabs her hand. And I don't know how I could survive if my mother was gone. If she didn't remember me.

Granger smiles at her, eyes wet.

I watch as she tries to shake it off. Tries to change the subject, but something's tugging at me.

Dolohov and Rowle.

"That's her! That's the bitch that Obliviated us!"

And I can see her. In her living room – only now filled with furniture. And I can't even fathom the idea of training my wand on my own mother.

She hasn't seen her parents in two years. Because of the Death Eaters. And the skin on my left arm pricks.

"It was very insightful of the Order to take that precaution." I look up at her, and her eyes are drilling into me, reading my meaning.

"Yes," she says. Her voice is stilted, laced with years of secrets. "I can't thank them enough."

Her eyes on mine. And she thanks me for my silence. Mother manages to take control of the conversation, and I let myself just enjoy the ride.

"Well, I should really be getting back to the shop. Thank you both so much for inviting me." Her eyes flicker to mine, before coming back to my mother. "And thank you for lunch."

"It was so wonderful to see you dear," Mother says. "Draco can escort you back to Cornerstone."

I watch as she opens her mouth to decline, and thinks better of it.

I'm pulling her chair, and handing her purse to her. She hugs my mother, and I watch her arms squeeze.

I wonder how badly she misses her parents. If they were close. If she's tried to reverse the charm.

She's quiet next to me as we walk. The wind is twisting the scent of her around us.

"Do you think you'll stay on with the Auror Office?" she asks. "Your term is up in six weeks or so, yes?" She looks up at me and several of her curls fly into her face.

I shove my hands into my pockets to keep from pushing them behind her ear for her. Perhaps walls were necessary at this point. Even weak ones.

"Yes, December 10th. I'll be starting something new, actually. Take a few weeks for the holidays, then jump into the new year," I say. "New millennium."

She probes. As I knew she would. And as I tell her I'm starting a consulting group, I feel a heaviness in my chest. Like waiting for my father to step out from the shadows and chastise me for involving her in any of this.

"I'm announcing on November 1st." I don't know why I find that relevant. I look down an alley as we pass it, thinking of what else we could talk about.

But she doesn't want to talk about anything else.

"A consulting group? And what will you specialize in?"

I try to remember my pitch to Skeeter from the other night. “Litigation and contracts, finances, management and operations, and I’m hoping to have a few other minor branches with select specialists.” I’m vague enough to be uninteresting, I hope.

She chuckles.

“What?”

“You're just... opening a company,” she says. She laughs again. “At nineteen.”

Does she think me incapable? A flicker of rage licks at me.

“You and your friends defeated a dark wizard at eighteen.”

“Actually, Harry was seventeen,” she says, grinning at the ground.

“Thanks for reminding me.” I roll my eyes.

“So, if I’m understanding this correctly, you’ll be providing legal counsel for Wizengamot hearings, advising businesses on their budgets and operations, things like that?”

There a discomfort in my chest. Something familiar. And the more information she tries to pry from me about M.C.G. the more the feeling spins.

All I know is that I want her as far away from M.C.G. and the inheritance as possible.

“Essentially.” I could go on, but I won’t.

“And you think individuals and businesses will hire you based on your nineteen years of experience in those fields?”

Is she mocking me? The tone of her voice wakes my pride like sleeping dragon.

“No. They will hire my *firm* based on the personnel I will surround myself with. Specialists and the like.” I huff.

I launch into a monologue about all the important people I will surround myself with. Mockridge, Ogden, Wentworth. I’m bragging. I’m name-dropping. And I can’t stop. I feel her eyes turn up to me, and I want her to be impressed. I want her approval. I’m launching into my plans for other branches to include charitable divisions when she stops me.

“That’s very exciting, Draco,” she says. I look at her for the first time and she’s grinning. No longer teasing me. “You don’t need to defend your company to me. I think it will be a great success.” I feel a lightness in my chest, eradicating the uncomfortable feeling from before. “You were excellent at leading the meeting on the dragon egg this week – prepared, succinct, authoritative. It’s like you were born for it.”

She was impressed by the meeting. Her words tumble around my mind.

Prepared. Succinct. Authoritative. Born for it.

Draco.

I close my mind. She's gotten too far inside. The wind twists around us again, and I have to keep myself from touching her. Kissing her, maybe.

We're back at Cornerstone, stopping to finish our conversation, and I think I should just wave goodbye and leave.

"You've been planning this for a while, it seems," she says. "Are you investing your inheritance into this new business?"

And that's what it was. The ugly feeling spinning around my ribs as she clawed her way into my plans and dreams. The need to keep her separate. To keep her in the dark. Like watching your mistress meet your wife.

"That's the plan."

"Investment and passion are two key ingredients for success," she says. I look down at her and she's smiling up at me. The wind pushes her hair towards me again. "And your father must be in support if he released your inheritance to you?"

It's like electricity. My face twitches, and I have to look away from her.

But she's asked a question that I have to answer. My skin itches.

"Yes, a small amount at first. Then the rest on January 1st. Contingent on a few things." Like us not having this conversation at all.

I have a sudden realization that once I leave the Ministry, once January 1st rolls around, I will probably never see her again but in passing. I swallow. My eyes rake over her while she steps up to the bookshop entrance.

"Well," she says, voice airy, turning back to me. "What a pity for all those half-blood and Muggle-born girls that thought you would invest all that money in their happy future with you." My heart beats in my ears, wondering if she knows how close she is to the truth. "How disappointing for them."

She reads the articles on me in the paper, clearly. And, of course she does, but she doesn't skim them. I think of the piece about last night's date with Jeannette, laying open on the counter.

"I thought you of all people knew not to believe a word of what Skeeter prints." I smirk at her, begging her to hear me. To disregard the Jeannettes and Jacquelines and Noelles and Katyas.

There's a smile tugging at her lips, and her face is turned to me, open and waiting. I watch as she shakes herself, like waking from a small dream.

She grins at me. Like we're friends. And maybe we are.

“I think we did a fine job today, Malfoy,” she says. “A full hour lunch date with your mother and no casualties. I’d say that’s progress.”

A lunch date. Progressing toward what? I feel my skin heat at the possibilities.

She nods goodbye, and turns to go inside. But I need her to know…

“Granger. About your parents…”

The words physically hit her. “Yes?”

I want to tell her. I want to tell her how smart she was to see it coming. How awful it could have been. How bloody brilliant she is to have hidden them so well.

“You did the right thing.”

“Thank you.” She’s gazing at me.

I should say goodbye. But I need to know.

“Have you… been by your home since the war ended?”

“No, not since I left.”

I feel fresh air flow into me. So grateful she hasn’t seen the wall. Seen the blood.

“Don’t.”

~*~

Wednesday, December 24, 1997

I couldn’t sleep the night Dumbledore died either. I lie in my bed now, like then, staring at the ceiling and waiting.

It’s snowing. A bit of Christmas magic.

I look at my clock. 5AM. Twelve hours.

A quiet knock on my door. It must be Mother.

I slip from my sheets and pad to pull the door open.

I’m surprised to see Severus. He stares at me on the threshold, black robes folded around him. He makes no move to enter, but looks into me. I feel him push against my walls.

“Good. You are focused,” he says, and sweeps into my room.

I close the door behind him and silence the room, casting charms to let us know if someone is coming close.

I turn to face him. I catch sight of my hollow cheeks in my mirror. Severus stands near my desk.

“Your aunt took you into the dungeons yesterday. More Cruciatus resistance?”

“No,” I say. “We killed rats. Father asked her to teach me.”

He nods. “Was she pleased with your progress?”

“Yes. I was able to kill three on my own.”

“It’s not the same, Draco.”

“I know it’s not.”

His black eyes prod into mine, taking me by surprise. But still he finds no cracks.

“Greyback will be joining them,” he says. He waits for me to react.

I don’t.

Greyback. I will need to adjust my approach.

He turns to my desk, and produces a large rolled parchment from beneath his robes. He lets it unravel, and places a paperweight down on the curling edge.

“Destroy this when you are done.”

I nod at him.

He pulls a handkerchief from his breast pocket, and clutched in the center of it is a marble. Careful not to touch the orb, he holds it out to me.

“This will take you to an abandoned mill in Cokeworth. There is a hotel called Railview just south. You can leave the Muggles there. Alter their memories if necessary.”

I nod, taking the handkerchief and portkey and placing them on my end table.

“Request an audience with Remus Lupin if you are captured by the Order. Tell him everything,” he says. I look at him blankly. “And I mean, *everything,* Draco.”

I nod.

He looks me up and down, then back to my empty eyes.

“It is possible she will not be there. She is very bright.”

“Weasley is with his family, yes? That is what the spies have told us?”

Severus lifts a brow in agreement.

“Gryffindors are acutely sentimental. You know this.” I move past him toward the parchment rolled open on my desk. “And the odds of her being there must be very high if Greyback is tagging along.”

He watches me as I look over the parchment, eyes dragging over the lines, trying to understand the drawing.

“You understand why I could not volunteer.” It’s not a question.

“Of course, Severus.” My eyes find a legend in the corner of the paperwork.

“I hope to see you back at Hogwarts in two weeks. If not, I will see you at the end of this.”

I chuckle. The end of this. Whatever that means.

I feel him staring at me, until he leaves.

The designs of a small two-story house stare up at me. A small entryway, and an opening to the left to the living area. A fireplace. Kitchen in the back. A staircase leading up to two bedrooms. I lean forward to examine them. Neither is larger. There is no master suite. One bedroom farther away from the street, quieter, easier to sleep, to read. Possibly for the parents.

But in that same back bedroom I see small markings inside the closet. I look closer, trying to figure out what they mean.

Bookshelves. Built in.

I spend the next hour memorizing the distance from the front door to the stairs, from the kitchen to the back door, from the front bedroom to the back bedroom.

I burn the scroll. I ask Mippy to bring my tea at 6AM. I refuse to see my mother.

I meditate, and pull the twisting clouded thoughts forward that Bella had me conjure as I trained my wand on the vermin. And I set my mind to planning.

Greyback first or Greyback last.

I dress in my black robes, sliding my arms into the fabric.

Dolohov will incapacitate before killing. He will tease. He will taunt. He won’t be my first.

I unwrap the marble in the white handkerchief, staring at it and watching the clouded glass catch the light.

Yaxley is efficient. He will kill on sight. He won’t be my last.

I pocket the marble and handkerchief, and grab my wand and my mask.

Greyback first or Greyback last.

I leave my room, shut my door, and walk down my hallway, ignoring the bedroom next to mine. I descend the stairs.

Greyback is not adept at wandwork. He's easily surprised and slow to move. But if Yaxley goes first and then Dolohov, Greyback will have time to react. If he is in close proximity to either Muggle, taking him last will put them at risk.

I meet their sneering faces in my entry hall, and we trudge together through the snow to the hill we can Disapparate from.

But if Greyback goes first, Yaxley will act immediately.

I'm still deciding the order in which to kill them when I Apparate onto the cement in front of a two-story house, neighbor's sprinkler clicking to my right.

~*~

Sunday, October 17, 1999

"Draco Lucius Malfoy, WAKE UP!"

I'm pulled from sleep by this voice. I'm still opening my eyes when something light slaps my face.

"What the fuck is this!"

Something slaps my chest.

"Bloody hell, what is going on?" I whine.

"I should ask you the same question!"

I look up and Blaise Zabini is on my bed, standing over me, hitting me with a newspaper.

"The fuck! Get off me!"

"You're out of Azkaban for barely two months and you're already fucking Hermione Granger?"

My eyes snap fully open. Cold chills through my chest.

"What?" I ask, heart pounding.

He unfolds the rolled up paper and shoves the front page in my face.

THE STAR-CROSSED ROMANCE OF HERMIONE GRANGER AND DRACO MALFOY
By Rita Skeeter

"What the fuck??"

I sit up, grabbing the paper from him and twisting my legs to ground my feet on the floor. There's a picture. I'm smirking at her. And I'm positively ravenous.

"No, no, no, no," I mutter, scanning the words and finding "lust-filled eyes" and "favorite mints" popping out at me. Skeeter botched it. She tricked me. "That bitch…"

"So, I can assume that this *isn't* your engagement announcement?" Blaise says from behind me.

"This isn't—It's not…" I take a deep breath, feeling my air thickening. "This was supposed to be in the society pages. It was supposed to be lunch with my mother. Good press for us."

"Oh, she has the lunch with your mother in there. Check page seven."

My fingers fumble, tearing at the paper, and there I am, escorting her across the street, my hand on her back as she looks up at me with wide eyes.

"She twitched! Why doesn't it show her twitching?? Why is she looking up at me like a doe-eyed, fucking…"

I see the picture of the three of us on the patio at Fortescue's. She's talking with my mother, and I'm devouring her.

"Oh fuck." I drop my head into my hands. "Oh, that slimy bitch."

"So," Blaise starts, "you and Granger –"

"Are *not* together." I jump up and begin pacing the room. "This has been grossly exaggerated. It was just lunch with my mother."

"Then what's the big deal?"

I look up at him. He's still on my bed, wearing his shoes. "What?"

"If it was just lunch…" he says. "If it was just for public opinion, then I'd say you accomplished that. Everyone knows Skeeter is a sensationalist."

I pace again. "These pictures are…"

"Two young people flirting?" Blaise laughed. "Nothing wrong with that. She's not with Weasley anymore, right?"

Ron Weasley is the least of my concerns. My father will see this paper today. Probably already has.

I look up at Blaise. "Why are you here?"

"Are you joking?" He smiles. He nods at the paper crumpled in my hands. "You're practically snogging Granger on the front page of the *Prophet.*" He grins and leans back on his hands. "Thought it was time I checked in!"

I look away from him. I run my hand through my hair as I turn back to the front page, watching her turn and smile at me.

“So, you two are friends?” he asks, eyes flicking over to the two of us on the front page.

I stare at him. “No,” I say. “I’m trying to distance myself from her.”

“Yeah, how’s that going?” he quips, and I watch as she turns on the steps of Cornerstone again. In the picture, my eyes do something strange, like fire.

“My mother is friends with her. They’ve been spending time together.” I pull my eyes off of her. “But she and I are the same we’ve always been.”

He laughs, and scrambles with the paper until it’s open to page seven again. “Yes, that’s how I look at my new friends’ sons.” He points to the picture of us walking, her eyes snapping up to look at me as I touch her.

I close the paper and shove it toward him. “We’re not –“ I shake my head, trying to find the words. “We’re not going to happen.” I feel the words sinking in my chest until they hit the bottom of my stomach.

“She dating someone?”

I look up, rolling my eyes. “No—“

“She a lesbian?”

I take moment to consider. “… No—“

The newspaper smacks me across the face again.

“The fuck is wrong with you, Draco!?”

“Stop hitting me!” He hits me again. “Stop! She doesn’t want me!”

He pauses, his arm still outstretched, ready to hit me again. “Have you *tried?* Made any kind of effort?”

I blink at him. This is nonsense.

He stares at me. And shrugs.

“Fine,” he says. “She doesn’t want you.” Factual and flippant. He opens the paper he’s been hitting me with, and shoves the front page into my face. I look up at him as he levels his gaze on me. “That doesn’t mean she never will.”

I narrow my eyes at him. He stands, places his hand on my shoulder, and smirks at me.

“Anyone can be seduced, Draco.”

I feel the words float onto my skin. He hands me the paper, and says, “Believe what you will – I mean, I haven’t been around. But I’d wager she’s halfway there.”

I look down at where we turn to smile at each other. The way her eyes almost look happy to land on mine.

Blaise claps my shoulder and pushes past me.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

“Back to Italy. I’m thirty minutes late for a meeting.” He winks at me, and starts to leave.

“You want a new job in January? Marketing and Public Relations?”

He turns, a smug and condescending expression on his face. “Draco, I already have the business cards drawn up.” He smirks and disappears out the door.

I listen to his footsteps carry him down the hall. I swallow. I watch our faces turn towards each other again. Watch how she joked about the girls who wouldn’t be my wife, and how I agreed. And it looks like I might kiss her goodbye. And she might have let me.

Anyone can be seduced.

I roll the words around my chest until I believe them.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all of your patience on this update! I have some free time these next few weeks, so the updates should be more regular.

Monday, October 18, 1999

There is no letter from Father. Not yesterday. Not yet today.

And I feel like I'm in a strange bubble until it arrives. A bubble that can be popped, yes, but still floating.

I run my hands through my hair for the fourteenth time, rustling the sides. I sprayed one more spritz of my cologne than normal, and immediately regretted it, so I had to take another shower.

After one last practiced smirk to the mirror, I head to the fireplaces, grab my briefcase from Mippy and pop through to the Ministry Atrium. I keep my eyes open for her, but I'm earlier than normal, and she likes to arrive right on time and stay late.

I get settled and meet with Robards.

"Can't say I know much about Runes, myself. Elected not to take that course," Robards mutters. I nod, looking down at the file we have. "But if you have any ideas," he continued. "I'd love to hear them. Let me know if you need a second pair of eyes."

I look up at him. I take a deep breath and dive in. "I suppose I could use another person. Any chance you think Granger could be spared from downstairs?"

Robards stares at me like I've given him a brilliant idea. "Granger? Yes, yes!" He smiles wide. "The two of you make a great team!"

I shrug. "She received an Outstanding in Runes. That's all I meant."

I'm whistling as I leave Robards office, offering to walk his note downstairs for him. I duplicate it, hand the original to Mathilda, and offer to tell Granger myself.

I'm twirling my wand around my fingers when I pass O'Connor, and not even his daft grin can put off my mood.

"Morning, Malfoy!"

"Good morning, O'Connor," I say. "Is Granger in?"

"Not yet. But should be any minute!"

"Excellent." I'm walking away from him as he starts to ask about my weekend.

Her cubicle is tidy. Several files she worked through on Friday are stacked in a neat pile. She has a picture of Potter, Weasley and her from third year, and another of two people who must be her parents, also taken about the same time.

I hear her voice coming from the direction of the lift. I sit in her chair. I stand. No, no. I'll sit.

I pull a file from the stack into my lap. I hear the click of her shoes, her ugly ministry ones, no doubt. At the last moment, just before she rounds the corner, I kick my legs up onto her desk. Perfect.

She stops in the entry when she sees me.

I smirk at her. "Hello, lover."

She blushes. Her breath leaves her in a laugh. And I watch as she pulls her eyes away from me.

"Good morning, Malfoy." She busies herself with her coat and bag. "What brings you here?"

Your legs – No, don't be ridiculous, Draco.

"Robards."

"Oh? More on the dragon eggs?"

She stands there, useless. I've completely thrown her off.

Excellent.

"Oh, no. That all got settled on Friday. Buyer caught and under questioning." I send her a grin. "I would have thought it would make the papers, but apparently there were more important things to report this weekend."

Merlin, I'm good. I can't believe how easy it is to bring up the article. I have to refrain from winking at her.

“Right. Apparently.” She smiles back and I feel my blood humming. She turns to her cabinets, trying to get ready for the day, but she’ll just have to work around me. I’ll stay in this chair and if she wants to work, she’ll have to sit in my lap. She continues, “I’ve written to Skeeter to ask her to correct some of her glaring inaccuracies. I would have thought the corrections would have made today’s *Prophet,* but hopefully this week.”

Of course she’s already complained to Skeeter.

“Inaccuracies?” I pout. “You mean those mints weren’t for me?”

She lifts a brow at me, and hits my foot with her paperwork. I suppose I could stand. I let her push past me to her chair, and don’t bother to move fully out of her way. Her hips brush against my thighs.

She prompts me about Robards and I hand her the memo. I watch her face as she reads. She’s still pink. The moment she fully comprehends the memo, I see her eyes widen in anxiety.

Before she can think about arguing with Mathilda, I say, “I’ve reserved the conference room upstairs for this afternoon, seeing as Level 4 has appallingly small rooms and cubicles.” I look around her space. “I think my cube might be twice the size of yours, Granger. And I’m temporary.” I lift a brow at her and she’s glaring back. “See you at one, Granger.”

I practically skip out of her office.

When she comes up after lunch, I already have the entire case laid out on the desk. I take the time to fully explain the points of interest, handing her pictures and notes, leaning over her shoulder to point at things. I get to see a blush creep up her neck.

Once she’s settled, we’re silent for the majority of the afternoon. When I get bored or need a stretch, I’ll reach across her for something and watch her jump.

I wonder if she would have reacted like this last week, before the article. But then again, it’s an unnecessary question because I would never have been this bold before – stretching my arms above my head, smirking at her, entering her personal space.

But before… I *had* seen her skin darken with a blush, her eyes take in my face and shoulders and occasionally my body. I look at her now. She’s hunched over a picture, deciphering its origin, her tongue dragging over her bottom lip, concentrating. It’s possible she’s attracted to me. To my looks. Which is an excellent place to start.

My stomach tightens with the possibilities.

She feels my eyes and just before she looks up at me, I make the decision not to look away.

“Find anything interesting?” I say.

“Er, not yet.” She blinks and looks back down at the pictures.

She blushes.

I grin.

On Tuesday morning, I swing by the café and get a tea. I was up most of the night, frustrated and overheated. As I reach the front of the line, I hear myself ordering a tea and a coffee. I fix it with a splash of milk and one sugar, fix my own tea, and then head upstairs.

Katie Bell and I share a lift on the way up. She chats with me about the charmed Muggle object they found last week, and I see her eyes drop to the second cup in my hands.

When I enter the conference room, she's already there. She's startled to see me so early, but I just place her cup in front of her and begin discussing the theories that ran through my head last night when I couldn't sleep for thoughts of her heaving chest.

Barely half an hour passes before she asks me how I knew she liked coffee over tea.

My pulse pounds, careful to give nothing away.

"Everyone knows you prefer coffee, Granger." I flip a page, refusing to give her a glance. "You've been spilling it all over the Hogwarts library books for years."

An indignant gasp, and before she can fight, I say, "I've checked books out after you and found the pages just soiled with spilt coffee. Practically dipped in it."

I smirk at the notes I'm going through. She huffs. And I remember the way she'd sip from a mug and read at the breakfast table.

I buy her another coffee on Wednesday morning, if anything, so I can see her blush at the gesture again. I beat her to the conference room, so I set it at her chair and start shuffling the notes. We're very close to finishing this.

I'm wearing an older set of robes today. They're not my favorite, but Mother says they bring out my eyes, whatever that means. I hate wearing colors other than grey or black, but I decided to give them a try.

I take a sip from my tea, and she flies into the room.

"That bitch!"

I sputter, trying to reconcile the idea of Granger using foul language outside of the bedroom.

"Sorry," she waves me off. "But she's wicked."

"Skeeter, I presume?"

"Yes. I wrote a follow-up letter last night asking about the status of my corrections, and threatening to write my next letter to her editor. And then this morning she prints this!"

She shoves the paper at me, and I try to focus on it instead of the spots of pink on her cheeks, or that fire in her eyes that's usually turned towards me.

At the bottom corner in tiny print, Skeeter has amended that we don't "canoodle" at Cornerstone Books.

Yeah, alright.

I look up. "Did you expect more, Granger?"

"I demanded more!" she screeches. "I demanded a re-print!"

I toss the *Prophet* back to her and smirk. We've steered clear of the article, and the "date" itself. Seems like the perfect opportunity to get inside her head. I ask, "And which portions of Sunday's article so offended you, Granger?"

She stares at me like she's just seen thestrals for the first time. And blushes. I almost shiver.

"The inaccuracies."

I smile down at my finger, scratching at the old table. "I believe Skeeter reported that I visited you at work, invited you to lunch with my mother, and then walked you back," I say. I look up and her eyes are wide and there are spots of pink on her neck, right where I'd kill to place my lips. "Was that not what happened?"

She opens her mouth, and then squashes whatever words she wants to say.

"Fine, then," she says. "It was her artistic interpretation of things. 'Lust-filled eyes' and exaggerations –"

"Ah, but I believe the 'lust-filled eyes' were mine," I interrupt, sending her my smuggest grin. "Are you worried about the stretch of the *Prophet?* If it's made its way to… say, Ireland?" I'm desperate to know what she thinks of her "fiancé's" reaction to all this.

She stares at me. Then recovers. "No, not really," she says, shrugging. "I was honestly more concerned with your reputation than mine. But if you don't care, I'll leave it alone."

She sits at the table, looking to start work. There's a superiority there. Like she thinks she's won something.

"My reputation?"

"Yes." I watch as she scratches her jaw and concentrates on her work. "If I had a girlfriend for every day of the week, I'd be in a hurry to mend things after that article."

My mouth drops. *A girlfriend for every day of the week.*

A laugh tears its way from my chest, and I'm thinking of how she keeps tabs on me in the newspaper. Knows about my dates. Knows about Skeeter's assumptions with my inheritance.

And something dances in my chest at the idea that she could possibly – even an inch of her – be envious.

“How kind of you to worry about my social life, Granger,” I coo. “But I believe my stock might have gone up.” She looks at me. “Nothing boosts a reputation more than having the Golden Girl on your arm.”

I hand her the coffee cup, and set about working on the Runes for the next six hours until she jumps up and squeals, bringing a copy of an old text in front of my face, pointing at the similarities in the case, eyes bright and chest heaving with anticipation.

~*~

Thursday, October 21, 1999

Getting to work next to her all week blinded me. I had some kind of single-minded focus on her and her reactions to me and how she makes me feel.

I’m just arriving home when I get a letter back from Cuthbert Mockridge, agreeing to sit down with me soon, paying me lip service about my father and how proud he would be of me. And I’m spiraling into sensations that my body hasn’t untangled in years.

My tongue is dry.

I drop the letter from Mockridge, and watch it flutter to the floor, my eye twitching.

Proud of me.

My eyes cross, and I pick a spot on the ground to focus on, reaching for the entry table to steady myself.

I can feel my heartbeat in my toes. I try to concentrate on that.

I inhale, feeling it spin around my chest, and force myself to exhale.

Usually I’m leaning on a sink, a pimply-faced ghost hushing me, trying to ease her hand across my back and sending shivers down my spine.

I feel the shivers regardless.

I inhale.

There’s water rushing through my ears, and I feel like it pours in one ear, sloshes, fills to the top, then a valve opens to rush out.

I hear Myrtle’s flirty laugh.

I inhale, but it’s not accomplishing anything.

What have I been doing? Playing house with Granger. Pretending to open a company with no skillset and no investors.

With money that isn’t mine. Not yet.

I have no contract with Father.

I inhale.

I have no binding document that states he will give me this money.

I focus on my Slytherin ring against the stone floor. I guess I fell.

I inhale. I hear it dragged across the stones.

The only thing I have is an agreement with him that if I spend the 35,000 wisely, and stay away from her, I'll be opening a company on January 1st.

A company I don't know how to manage.

A dream.

I inhale and it chokes me.

I smell the dust on the floor and I wonder how Mippy could allow such dirt in my father's home.

Not mine.

Nothing is yet.

I push air through my nose, and I'm able to flip onto my back, staring at my father's ceiling.

I don't have a technique for this. Severus does.

Severus knows how. Standing over me, digging into my mind.

I feel the stone beneath my ribs, pressing up against me. Pressing down on me. Pressing in on me.

"Mr. Malfoy, you can breathe."

"I can't."

My hands on my chest, scratching at old scars, staring at the low ceiling of a small house, dusty with cobwebs and neglect.

"Mr. Malfoy, there is no time. He is expecting us back."

"I failed."

"The task is complete. The headmaster is dead."

"But I failed."

I'm looking up into Severus's eyes, sucking in air, throat closing. Potter's voice yelling "Coward!" at our backs is bouncing around my skull.

"You are more trained than this. This behavior is beneath you. You cannot stand before the Dark Lord unprepared."

Black spots peppering the edges of my vision.

"He's dead."

"Draco, find your walls."

His presence in my mind like a snake, pushing and seeing everything. Seeing the moment Dumbledore offered me sanctuary.

"Draco, he will want to know why you did not do it yourself. Work harder. I have trained you better than this."

He slithers through me and I only see his black eyes hovering. Tears leak out from the sides of my face, sliding down to my ears.

"Do you know how easily I can find her like this?"

And he's pulling forward a blue dress spinning, coffee cups, my hand on her hip in Umbridge's office, the fantasy of her breasts bouncing as she rides me – pumping myself in my four-poster, sugar quills, wide eyes, pink lips on my chest, small hands threading into my hair –

I can hear my throat rasping around thin air.

"Don't—"

"Stop me. Protect her."

And a jewelry box finally appears in my mind. It closes, and locks.

SPLASH!

Ice cold water against my face, burning my eyes, drowning my open mouth.

"Master Malfoy!"

I'm back in the manor, and Mippy is above me, terrified, holding a bucket.

"Master Malfoy! Mippy is not knowing what to do!"

I'm coughing, sitting up, heaving in air.

"You is laying there. You is not hearing me!"

The letter from Mockridge is just there, to my left, floating away on the stream.

I wipe my face.

“Mippy gets Mistress for you?”

“No.” I stand on shaking legs. “No, I—Thank you, Mippy. Please don’t tell my mother.”

I snatch up the letter, and crawl up the stairs to my room, leaving the elf in the entry hall. I cast a drying charm and a warming charm.

I don’t stop shivering.

I re-read Mockridge’s letter for what it is. A positive sign. A good thing.

I write back to him, quill scratching strange penmanship on the parchment, setting up a time and place.

I pull another parchment and think of how to ask Father about our deal. How to apologize—

Not apologize. If I apologize then there is something to apologize for.

How to trivialize. How to suggest that our deal remains and to get something in writing.

The ink blots on the empty page.

Father won’t appreciate letters. He values actions.

The quill meets the parchment to write:

Katya,

Dinner tomorrow night. It’s important.

D.M.

~*~

Friday, October 22, 1999

“I had no idea you knew Hermione Granger so well! I’ve been hoping to make an acquaintance with her.”

My wine glass stops its journey to my lips. I blink at her.

“I don’t.”

Katya stares at me.

“What do you mean, ‘you don’t,’” she says, laughing. “You spent the afternoon with her last week!”

I take a deep swallow of the wine.

“She’s friends with my mother.” I pat my lips with my napkin.

I cut into my meat. I chew aggressively. It’s bland.

Katya is quiet. I look up, and she has her elbows on the table, fingers steepled under her chin. She’s studying me.

Fuck.

“We were in the same year at Hogwarts. You knew that.” My voice is lighter. Friendlier.

“True,” she says. “But I didn’t know you kept in touch.”

Katya takes a deep drink from her glass, eyes on me.

“We work at the Ministry together now.” I hear the familiar lines spin out of me. I look back at my plate and continue picking at the tasteless meal.

“So,” Katya chirps, changing the subject. “What is so ‘important’ about this dinner? I saw your *Daily Prophet* photographer waiting outside.”

I nod. “I was wondering if we could discuss public affection… in relation to our agreement.”

Her brows raise. “I assume you’re not talking about holding my hand.” She laughs. “Is your social life not ‘desirable’ enough yet, Draco?” she teases. “You have at least two dates a week *and* you are going on family outings with Hermione Granger.”

The muscle under my eye twitches, and I look away. When I come back to her she’s watching me. I give her the reason I’m sure she’ll understand, better than anyone.

“My father is not impressed.”

We finish our meal. She laughs. I help her slip into her coat. She takes my hand as we exit. We turn the corner for the Apparition point, and Katya turns to look up at me.

I’m trying to remember the last time I kissed a girl. It was Pansy of course. But had it really been almost three years ago?

I slide my fingers into her hair, and it’s too smooth. I press my lips to hers and they’re too full.

I hear the click.

~*~

Saturday, October 23, 1999

“What do you think you’re doing?”

The voice is firm, hiding anger.

I blink awake, wondering if I need locking charms on my door to stop friends and family from waking me with newspapers.

My mother stands tall next to my bed, glaring down at me. And, alas, holding the *Prophet.*

“Sleeping?”

She unfolds the paper and hands it to me. Katya and I have made the society section.

“Why would you do this? What *possible* game do you think you’re playing?”

I tear my eyes away from the information Skeeter has gleaned. I look into my mother’s cold blue eyes, surprised I need to spell this out for her.

“Father’s game.”

She scoffs. “I told you not to worry about your father –“

“No, you told me to make up my own rules. Here they are.”

She stomps her foot and grabs the paper back from me. She’s usually more controlled than this.

“Have you given any thought to the repercussions of this?” She shakes the paper.

I blink at her. “Meaning?”

“How do you think this will affect Hermione?”

I stare at her. “Probably not one bit.” I shove the covers off and start getting dressed. I have Quidditch practice at dawn, and I can just make out the first rays of sunlight through my curtains.

“You will fix this.”

I turn from my closet door. “Excuse me?” I lift a brow at her.

She’s gone mental.

“You will go to Cornerstone today and fix this.” She paces. “I have a book on reserve that I intended to pick up myself, but you will go instead.”

“Fix *what?* Mother, I have no idea what you’re on about.” I grab a shirt from its hanger. “What on *earth* gave you the impression that Granger and I are *courting?”*

She throws the paper on the ground.

“You’re an idiot.”

She storms out.

~*~

Saturday, October 23, 1999 – later

The Weasley girl is watching me again. She grins whenever I catch her.

It gives me anxiety.

We play the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes tomorrow, and although they are no match for us, Potter's insisting on trying out new drills to prepare for Magical Transportation next weekend on Halloween.

The Weasley girl keeps passing to me whenever I'm open, congratulating me on scoring, trying to make small talk with me on our breaks.

Her change of heart has transferred to Potter, who is also behaving uncharacteristically kind to me.

I feel like there's a joke I'm not in on. It sours my mood.

Then, after practice, I see one of our Beaters flipping through the *Prophet.* He whistles.

"Malfoy, you have excellent taste."

I see the top of Katya's head from where he turns the page to the Keeper.

"She's a family friend," I say, grimacing. I wanted the gossip, didn't I?

"Wish I had family friends like her," one of them says and the other one laughs.

"Oi!" Weasley calls. "No misogyny allowed in the locker room!" She kicks the shins of one of them. And I see her eyes take in the *Prophet* as they chuckle. She blinks down at the picture of Katya and I, seeing it for the first time.

I have to avoid her eyes as she looks up at me, glaring as if I've dumped her best friend for a second-rate version, and then paraded her around town. Which, according to Skeeter, is exactly what I did.

They invite me for drinks. I decline. Potter forces me to go, even as the Weasley girl glares at me. I leave after one drink, and everyone complains, begging me to spend more time. I'm still confused as I pop into Diagon Alley, shaking off the feeling of Goldstein's drunken goodbye hug.

I'm not sure I much care for "friends." They're fickle things.

I'm approaching Cornerstone when suddenly a small grey-haired lady jumps in my path.

"You should be *ashamed* of yourself, Draco Malfoy!"

My eyes widen as I trip to keep from running into her.

“I’m sorry?”

“Hermione Granger would have made you a better man by *far* – and although I have no idea why such a bright girl would ever *lower* herself to be with *you,* you deserve Dragon Pox in the nastiest of areas for breaking her heart!”

She shoves me, and then marches away.

I’m dumbfounded, standing on the cobblestones and deciding that, no – I have *never seen that woman before in my life!*

I look back at her. A Cornerstone bag clutched in her withered hand.

I look to the stone building on the corner, with the slightly-off front door.

Breaking her heart.

I move toward one of the side windows, and peek in at her. She’s behind the counter, smiling with a customer, writing in the ledger book.

I shake myself. Ridiculous. She looks well-rested and content.

The front door swings open as I reach for it, and I’m face-to-face with a nine-year-old girl – pigtails and glasses. She gasps when she sees me. Then bursts into tears.

“Why – why would you d-do that??”

I stare down at her. “What?”

“You w-were so perfect!” Her little brown eyes look up at me, glassy and red-rimmed.

“What?”

Her father appears behind her.

“Sorry, Mr. Malfoy.” He takes her shoulders. “She’s a big fan of Miss Granger’s.” He gives me an apologetic smile and steers her away down the street, her hiccups echoing as they go.

Perhaps the kiss with Katya was the wrong thing to do.

The door falls shut in front of me, and I look in once more. She’s reading a book behind the counter, smiling to herself.

I roll my shoulders. She’s fine. Her fan club is simply over-reacting.

A woman enters, passing me in the doorway, and sends me a glare to rival Ginny Weasley’s.

But maybe I’ll come back later when there are less spectators.

I occupy myself in Diagon Alley for the next few hours. Finally, at quarter to six, when I see the last of her customers trickle out the door, I take a deep breath and let myself in.

“What do *you* want?” she hisses at me.

I’m rethinking my plan. But I paste on a cocky smirk and try to play the part.

“A book? Do you sell those here?”

She grimaces. “We close in fourteen minutes. You had to come at the very end of the day?”

I reach the counter and lean as casually as I can. “Well, I didn’t want any onlookers for our torrid love affair, Granger.”

She looks away, and I think I spot pink on her cheeks. I tell her the book is on reserve. She bends to retrieve the book, and I’m ever so grateful that there’s no one else here to catch me drinking in the sight of her.

Mother has picked another pink and bedazzled book. She raises a brow at me as she sets it on the counter.

She’s quiet as she opens the ledger book. I think of her sharp greeting to me, the people on the street today, even Mother’s reaction.

I’m supposed to “fix this,” according to Mother.

I’m about to ask her something to gauge her mood when she speaks first.

“A reporter asked me today if you let me down easy.” She continues to write in the ledger, with a quick glance at me. “I assume you were seen with one of your girls last night?”

One of my girls. The phrase irks me.

“Yes, Katya,” I say. And I can’t help myself. “I have six more to go. One for every day of the week, right?” she frowns up me, quill scratching deeply. “Which reminds me,” I say, leaning down onto the counter comfortably. “Do you have five more copies of this?” I tap the book she’s logging.

She rolls her eyes, and with the perfect amount of swottiness, says, “You know Draco, just because you *give* them books doesn’t mean they’ll learn to read.”

The ease with which she hums my name. The clear and strong dislike of the girls I’m dating.

I can feel my blood heat, and as she checks in with me to see her joke land, I push further, begging her to play this game with me.

“Granger. If you miss being pictured in the papers with me, I think my Wednesday girl might be a bit of a dud. The day’s all yours.”

It catches her off guard, but she recovers with a frown. “I’ll have to check my calendar and get back to you.”

She tries to get rid of me. She hands me the book in a paper bag.

“Gift wrap?”

She produces a gift bag and tissue paper, and hisses, “Do it yourself.”

She stomps off, taking the books she needs to refile, and ends the conversation.

Well, Mother wouldn’t really call that “fixing it.”

I’m about to leave when I see the corner of a newspaper peeking out of the rubbish bin behind the counter. And like a magnet, I’m pulled around the counter to the picture of Katya kissing me last night.

I assume you were seen with one of your girls last night?

She knew. And she still brought it up.

That familiar pull in my chest. The hope that she cares even the slightest about my social life.

I can’t leave now. She’ll have to force me out. I have to know…

I find the wrapping paper roll under the counter, and that’s how she finds me: smarmy and making a mess at her station.

“Malfoy! You can’t be back here!”

“You said ‘do it yourself!’”

She moves behind me, coming to the wrapping paper area and huffs. She frowns down at the counter. “You don’t want a gift bag?”

“Well, Katya received that beautifully wrapped gift that you prepared last week, so I can’t go giving the rest of them second rate wrap-jobs. Best to be equal with things like this.”

She mutters something condescending about me, but I can’t hear her. I’m focusing on the way her lips press together at Katya’s name and her agitation as she begins wrapping the book.

I watch her fingers as they move, the Muggle way again. I should step back from her. We’re very close now that she’s behind the counter as well, and I can feel the heat from her. She has to tuck her elbows in to keep from knocking me as she works. But I don’t care.

“How’s your dragon project going?”

She stops and looks up at me, eyes curious.

“Er… fine. I submitted my initial proposal yesterday, so Mathilda will review it and make the necessary adjustments before submitting it to Kingsley – er, Minister Shacklebolt.”

She’s fumbling with tape when I ask, “And have you sat down with the Minister, to discuss it?”

She glances at me again, as if confused by my interest. “Um, no? That’s what the proposal is for.”

How could she be so intelligent yet so unwise?

“You are close, personal friends with the Minister of Magic, having fought a war with him. If you can’t take the man to tea – or coffee – to discuss a passion project, then what good is that friendship?”

“How very Slytherin of you,” she scoffs, and I bristle at the words. “A friendship cannot be just a friendship. You have to gain something from it, is that right, Malfoy?”

I’m stepping into her and wondering how much I could “gain” with her as I say, “And how very Gryffindor of you. Bravely beginning something without any idea of how to get what you want.”

I see her take a shallow breath and look up at me. I’m so much closer to her now. Haven’t stood this close since the hallway at the Ministry. I see her eyes roam my face, and I think of all the different ways my words can be interpreted. And I want to push her back against the countertop, feel her body along mine and discuss all the ways the two of us can get what we want.

“All good down here?” Morty. “Mr. Malfoy! What a pleasure again!”

I step away from her and smile at him. I make apologies for keeping her late, but I don’t retreat from the counter. I stay at her side as she hurries to finish the ribbon on my gift, her body stretching to accommodate my presence. I can feel her breath and I can smell her hair.

She stuffs the book in the bag.

“Thank you for shopping at Cornerstone Books.” She glares up at me. And I’m still dreaming about what would have happened if Morty hadn’t interrupted when she pushes past me – hips against my thighs again.

I bid Morty a good night, and Apparate home.

Mother is in the library. I toss the wrapped book on the settee.

“Why do you keep getting these wrapped?” she asks.

I shrug. “It pisses her off.”

She scowls at me. I turn to head to the kitchen, to find what’s left of dinner.

“Any message for your father?”

I stop, the warmth of the past hour leaching from me. I turn to her.

“Father?”

She begins unwrapping her book with delicate fingers.

“His October visit. I’ll be going tomorrow.” She glances up at me like everything is normal. “Anything you’d like me to discuss with him?”

So many things race around my brain, and I think about asking to go in her place. I have so many things to finalize with him.

“No,” I say. “Tell him… Tell him hello, I guess.”

She studies me, and nods.

I head up to my room, not hungry.

~*~

Sunday, July 13, 1997

I didn’t sleep well last night.

But of course, I haven’t slept in two weeks. Not since the Astronomy Tower.

I climb from bed, stumble into proper clothing, and make my way to the drawing room, ignoring the sounds of other people in my house. Mother and I have been taking tea in the mornings in the drawing room while our houseguests ravage the breakfast table. There’s a cold, hollow wind in the hallways – a feeling I’ve come to associate with the presence of the Dark Lord in our house.

I gather myself, and turn at the base of the stairs, pushing open the drawing room door.

My feet stop when I see my Father.

He turns to me. I haven’t seen him in the flesh for over a year. He’s so thin. He’s still in his Azkaban robes. This must have just happened.

My mother stands next to him, holding his hands.

“Draco,” he says. His voice is thin too.

I move toward him. I reach my hands to hug him, to hold him as if no time has passed.

His hands clutch my shoulders, stopping me, staring at me.

“You did well, son.”

There is a muscle twitching at his temple.

“Severus had to step in, yes, but they shouldn’t have expected more from you,” he says. His eyes are glued to my face, like he sees something he hadn’t before. “Bella told me about the Vanishing Cabinets. *Very good,* Draco.” He presses a cold hand to my cheek.

If my father ever was released from Azkaban, I imagined him waking me in the night, my mother throwing my traveling cloak at me, and ordering me to pack only what would fit in one valise. I imagined a portkey to France, to our vineyards.

“I’ve spoken to Bella about your future,” he says. His eyes continue to drink me in. “Our future,” he says.

Mother turns to the windows, and I see her stare at the gardens with empty eyes.

“You will need more training, Draco. More than just Occlumency.”

He still assumes Bella is the one who taught me all that I know.

If my father ever was freed, I imagined a trip to Italy to his favorite restaurant, drinking the 500-year-old scotch with him, like we did for my fourteenth birthday.

“They don’t expect anything of you, Draco,” he says. “So, you will impress them greatly once you’ve learned from Bella.”

“Learned what?” I say, the first words I’ve spoken in this room.

“Dark magic. The Unforgivables.” His fingers are digging into my shoulders, and I can feel my pale skin accepting the marks he indents. “She’ll start with you today. Resisting the Imperius Curse, then casting it.” He nods vigorously. “You have six weeks before returning to school. The Carrows will be there. If you know the Cruciatus and Imperius Curse, you will impress them greatly.”

I swallow. “And after the Cruciatus and Imperius?”

My mother shifts at the window, pressing her teeth together.

“Then she’ll prepare you for battle.” He smiles at me. His teeth are yellow. His temple twitches.

If my father ever returned to us, I imagined the three of us would run away from all of this. We wouldn’t look back as Great Britain destroyed itself. And we would be happy.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Thursday, March 2, 1995

I smile at the magazine, reading it at breakfast. I don't know how she's managed to piss off Rita Skeeter, but Skeeter has retaliated.

Miss Granger, a plain but ambitious girl, seems to have a taste for famous wizards that Harry alone cannot satisfy.

Pansy is giggling next to me. She had slid the magazine to me, happily awaiting my response. Tracey Davis is trying to read it over my other shoulder.

"You're in here Pans!" Tracey squeals. "You called her ugly!" Tracey cackles.

"'*Really* ugly,'" Pansy corrects. I can feel her watching me, waiting for praise.

My eyes stutter over the bit about Krum inviting her to Bulgaria over the summer. I tear my eyes from the page and turn to Pansy.

"Brilliant," I say. I wink at her.

She kisses me on the mouth.

I'm still trying to get used to this odd relationship Pansy's gotten me into. Apparently if I get to have sex with her once a week, she gets to kiss me in public.

"Has Potter seen it?" I ask.

It feels like the entire Slytherin table cranes their necks to peer around the Ravenclaws. The Golden Trio are chatting happily, Weasley dropping food onto himself, Potter reading a letter, and the Golden Girl is going over her Potions book.

"Let's take it over there!" Pansy grabs for the magazine.

"Not so fast!" I take it back. "In Potions." I smirk. Pansy giggles.

We stride out of the Great Hall, like a pack of wolves. Pansy shoves the magazine into Blaise's face, and he and Daphne read as they walk. Crabbe and Goyle trail behind. I can hear

Goyle asking Crabbe what we're all supposed to be happy about.

We wait for them outside Snape's classroom. As they approach, Pansy is barely in control of her excitement – quite irritating actually – and tosses the magazine at Granger.

Before they can read it, Snape ushers us in. We're twisting in our seats to watch them read it.

I'm waiting to see her face change. I'm waiting for her to flush with embarrassment, and Potter to grumble. Skeeter laying their personal details out in the open, possibly ruining their future happiness, and I'm giddy. Maybe Potter will see what a slag she is and ditch her.

"I can't wait to see how this affects Weasley," Pansy chuckles.

She's sitting just to my right, and I take my eyes off of Granger's furrowed brows to look at her. "Weasley?"

"Yes!" she whispers. "I want to see if he believes any of it! See if they fight!"

I blink at her. "Believes what?"

"About her and Potter! Oh, it would be so lovely to split them all up over this," she hisses. "He's already so broken up about Krum and her."

I look back to the three of them in the back row. Weasley is frowning, ears turning red.

My brain is spinning.

"What do you mean? About Weasley?"

My eyes dig into her as she turns to look at me. She speaks slowly. "Weasley and Granger are completely obsessed with each other."

I feel like a piece of me cracks. Maybe it's a rib. Maybe is a piece of my skull, opening to allow this to pour into me.

"You mean Potter. She's Potter's Mudblood." My voice is flat, lifeless.

Pansy chuckles. "Boys can be so thick sometimes." She glances back to watch the Golden Trio again before leaning into me. "Potter and the Mudblood are friends. Nothing there. It's Weasley she's got her sights set on. I mean, I think the Weasleys are worse than Muggles really, but the thought of her trying to dilute their pure blood with her disgusting…"

Pansy's diatribe washes over me as I look back the three of them, words and phrases jumping out.

"… always fighting…"

I watch as he points at the article and she rolls her eyes at him.

"… so jealous *all* the time…"

He asks her a question and she blushes. He starts absently grinding his pestle onto the table, watching for her answer.

"… probably fancied each other for years."

I take in the way he's leaning into her. Closer than Potter gets. She looks up at him and averts her eyes, lashes fluttering and blush creeping up her neck.

Severus interrupts everyone. He takes points from the Gryffindors for reading a magazine in class. He then proceeds to read the article out loud.

I laugh at all the right moments. I sneer at the back table.

But I'm watching as Potter's embarrassment is not for himself, even as Severus reads gossip about his love life. He's embarrassed for his friend.

I look at Weasley. He's boiling.

I'm still trying to piece together how I missed this.

I'd always thought it was Potter. Potter with the Quidditch skills and the amazing luck. Potter with the ear of Dumbledore and every bloody teacher at this school. Potter who took her on adventures, and needed her intellect, and allowed her into their Golden Trio.

Severus separates them. She's banished to a seat on Pansy's other side, much to Pansy's delight. Potter sits up front.

I glance at the back of the room again, where I find a ginger staring at her, pouting.

Pansy turns to me, cackling at something she just said to Granger, expecting me to have heard and approved. I tear my eyes from the back row and smile at her.

Krum was a travesty, but acceptable.

Potter I could live with.

But a Weasley?

I blink at the chalkboard, writing the ingredients down, Pansy's hand on my knee.

~*~

Thursday, October 28, 1999

She's been trying to ignore me this week. In the lifts. In the café.

When Potter appeared, looking for his blasted croissants, dragging her along behind him on Tuesday, she couldn't meet my eyes.

I'm trying to figure out if she's uncomfortable with our… "flirting" on Saturday, or if it's something else. Maybe the Gringotts project.

But when I find myself in a slowly moving lift on Thursday with Mathilda Grimblehawk, I take an opportunity.

“I hear Granger’s got some excellent ideas for Gringotts,” I say to her, after we’ve exchanged our hellos.

“Yes, yes. She’s quite forward-minded, isn’t she?” Mathilda says as she thumbs through the chin-high stack of paperwork in her arms, looking for something. I reach for the pile as it leans dangerously to the left. “Thank you, Malfoy. But yes, I’m reviewing it with her tomorrow.” She pulls a folder from the stack and stares down at it quizzically. “Must find a compromise the Goblins will like.”

I watch her as her eyes scan the folder. She’s given nothing away to an untrained eye. But clearly Granger’s proposal is not going through.

“I do hope a compromise can be reached,” I say, grinning. “My family has a long history with dragons. I’m named for the dragon constellation, of course.”

Mathilda looks up at me, almost seeing me for the first time. It looks like she only had time to brush her mascara over one eye, not the other.

“Of course. I assumed!” She grins. I send her the same smirk I graced Skeeter with a few weeks ago.

“My mother is also very interested in the project. Granger has discussed it with her and caught her attention with it. And my mother is always looking for projects to invest in…”

It was like Mathilda had galleons in her eyes.

“That’s very kind of her. Your mother has always been very philanthropic, hasn’t she?”

I nod. I notice that Mathilda has stopped flipping through her file, giving me her undivided attention as the lift jumps toward her floor.

“Well,” she continues, “we’ll do our best to prevent harm to the dragons. But Gringotts won’t be budging on a few things. They want a beast.”

We arrive at her floor. I help her gather her paperwork into a manageable pile and say goodbye.

A beast.

I head straight home after work. I was going to head to the field, fly around, practice some of the drills Potter will play on Sunday. But I pop through the Manor fireplaces and head into the library. I take my dinner in there, and Mother doesn’t mind.

There’s something about the word “beast” that hangs on my mind.

I’m digging through the stacks for the copy of *Fantastic Beasts* for ten minutes before I realize *she* has it. Borrowed it. Probably has the answer right there in front of her.

I frown at the books in front of me. There's a book on goblins from the 16th century that winks at me. I pull it, and flip through several chapters.

I'm sitting in between the bookshelves, two hundred pages in when I find it.

Substantial evidence hath proven a dislike and loathing between the race of Chimaera and the race of Goblin, such as it behooves the Chimaera to avoid the Goblin altogether.

I drop the book and jump to my feet, turning the corners to find the fables and fictions.

Three hours later I have sources from five different texts, all claiming that the Chimaera bow only to goblins. I'm itching to pull together a report and cite these books before I realize that that is Granger's job. And handing her a proposal before she meets with Mathilda today will only aggravate her.

No, this has to be her project.

I'm penning Morty a note, asking if Cornerstone carries the fairytale book, and if so, can he put it on hold for tomorrow, when Mother enters the library.

It must be late. Why is she still up?

"Breakfast?" she says.

I twist my head to look at the grandfather clock in the corner. It's 5AM already.

I look back at her in surprise. "Yes, thank you."

She's scowling at me, holding a newspaper between her fingers.

She slaps the paper down on the side table.

"I *told* you not to mess with that Bulgarian girl." She marches out of the room.

I approach the *Daily Prophet* slowly, mind racing through all of the possible things that could have set my mother off.

She has it flipped open to the society pages, and I turn the paper over, finding a picture of Granger with a sandy-haired bloke.

And Hermione Granger seems to have recovered from the sting of Draco Malfoy's womanizing ways! She was seen last night at the Galloping Griffin, drinking Butterbeer with Rolf Scamander, grandson of Magical Creature activist and author Newt Scamander. The two of them chatted for three hours, in what looks to be the first of many promising dates between the two activists.

I can't stop watching the picture move. She's flapping her hands around, telling him a story. He makes her laugh, and then continues to stare at her fixedly.

I set the paper down, and run a hand down my face. Exhaustion finally claims me. I look at the note I'm about to send to Morty.

While I was slaving through the library, filling holes in her dragon project, she was on a date.

For at least three hours. Maybe she's still on that date.

Maybe she's waking up just now, silencing her alarm, and turning over in his arms and asking if he'd like breakfast.

No. It was a first date. She wouldn't…

The picture of them stares up at me from the side table. She laughs.

I swallow, and head to find my owl.

~*~

Saturday, October 30, 1999

At precisely 5:30PM, I pull the door to Cornerstone, whistling some old tune.

She practically growls at me.

Oh, excellent.

"Draco, just because Skeeter *writes* that you visit Cornerstone every Saturday, doesn't mean that you *have* to."

She grabs the bag that Morty left for me yesterday and punches it down on the counter. She looks like she's been waiting all day to beat something up. Or someone.

"Why, you look positively *feral* today, Granger. Something new with your hair?" I snipe back, eyeing her curls pulled back into a loose ponytail.

She says nothing to that. "Will you be needing this gift wrapped, sir?"

"Naturally." She turns to pull the ledger book. I jump right to it. "Your meeting with Mathilda didn't go as planned, eh?"

She stops flipping pages in the book. "How did you know?" She looks at me, as if wondering if *I* am the reason the proposal didn't go through. Oh, if she only knew.

"I hear things," I say, smirking.

"She thinks the goblins won't compromise, that they want a beast," she grumbles, pulling the book out of the bag.

"That's too bad. You'll think of something else." I say it like it's timed that way.

She sees the book, and a sly smile pulls her lips. Her eyes drift to mine, ready for a battle.

“Could your girl not handle the fiction?” she says, and I watch gleefully as she thinks she’s won the game. “We could also wrap up a dictionary for her?”

Her eyes are wide and happy. I lean forward, relaxing into the counter, ready to spend the next five minutes bantering with her while she wraps.

“No, no. If she learned bigger words, then we’d have to communicate more.”

“Of course,” she agrees, and she turns away, rolling her eyes. She grabbed the wrapping paper and scissors. “If she likes this one, Draco, there is another I’d recommend. *A is for Acid Pops, B is for Broom, C is for Centaurs.* It’s a best seller for that reading level.”

She thinks she’s hilarious. She thinks she’s got me beat.

“You’ve started calling me Draco,” I hum.

Her fingers freeze on the fold. She looks up at me, like I’ve caught her cheating on her O.W.L.s. Some of her hair is falling into her eyes and I want to push it back for her. I wonder what she’d do.

She moves her hair behind her ear, and clears her throat.

“Well, I guess… your mother calls you Draco, so…”

“Yeah, I can’t get her to stop doing that.”

I see her smile down at the paper, and my chest warms. It’s not like when she used to laugh with Potter. It’s quieter. More like she wants the moment for herself.

I watch her wrap the book. Silly childish thing. But I’m going to make her wrap it. And put a nice bow on it.

I can feel my heartbeat in my fingertips, excited for her to realize what I’ve discovered. My hands almost shake, so I twist my ring around my thumb. She’s pressing the fold down on the orange wrapping paper. Her fingers move quickly. And I think of how strong they probably are. Years of doing things the Muggle way, still doing things the Muggle way out of habit, and maybe her hands have little calluses or scars. How her fingers would feel on my skin.

And I’m yanked out of my meandering thoughts by the image of her strong fingers with the sandy-haired Scamander boy.

“I’ve not had the opportunity to meet Rolf Scamander, but I hear he’s a fascinating bloke.”

I wish I hadn’t once it’s out of me.

She looks up at me, and her strong hands fumble with the wrapping. She opens her mouth, and closes it.

“I… Yes, I mean, I hadn’t met him before either.” Her eyes come back to the wrapping. “He’s very open to discussing his grandfather’s legacy, so I found him quite… er, quite

fascinating."

She's nervous. Maybe hiding something. Maybe she's embarrassed that she'd let Scamander take her home on the first date, something "she never does, really, Rolf," and after she'd examined his book collection and had another glass of wine, she let him undress her—

She's blushing. I refocus on my plan.

She'll wrap this gift in a bow. I'll ask her to retie it, since this gift is pretty special to me. She'll roll her eyes.

And then I'll ask her if she wouldn't mind addressing it for me, since her penmanship is so much nicer than my own. She'll growl and hiss at me and I'll watch her pout about which girl this was for. But I'll make her write a note about the chapter on Chimaeras. If she doesn't see it then, then I'll ask for her to address it directly to herself.

And when she looks up at me in awe and confusion, I'll smirk at her, raise a brow, and walk out, leaving her with the perfectly wrapped gift.

Maybe she'll come to her senses, remember the fable about Chimaeras, and come running around the counter –

The door behind me clicks. I sigh. I'm thinking about hexing whoever it is when she says, "Good evening."

I need to make up an excuse to stay. To walk around the stacks for bit until this customer has left. I look past her and don't see any other books on reserve. Who is this idiot?

"Ron. Hi."

Every muscle in my body freezes. My eyes snap up to her to make sure she's kidding. She's not.

I stand up, and turn my head to find Weasley on her welcome mat. His hand is still on the door, like he's not sure he's fully entered the space yet. He looks between me and her. And his eyes come back to me.

I feel my body humming again, drunk on testosterone. I smirk at him, and turn back to my comfortable position, right where I was before he so rudely interrupted.

"Well, what do you know. They *do* get the paper in Ireland."

She slowly drops the work she was doing on the wrapping paper, and comes around the counter. My eyes track her as she approaches him. His eyes are still on me. I smile at him.

They hug, exchange pleasantries. And still I stand here. Leaning really. Seeing as this is a book shop, and I am purchasing a book, there's really no reason for me to leave.

She tries to pull back from him and he holds her close, his eyes sliding to me.

So he knows.

I wonder if it was the pictures that did it.

Or just my presence here, cementing the wild thoughts running through his mind for the past few weeks.

Finally, she's able to escape him, coming back around the counter. He looks at me.

"Malfoy."

"Weasley," I say. I make sure to look as "at home" as I possibly can. "Excellent game last week."

I can't help myself. He scowls at me, ears turning red.

"So, you'll be here tomorrow morning for the Quidditch scrimmage?" she asks, fingers moving quickly on the wrapping. I wonder if I should still tease her about making the wrap and bow perfect. "You can sit with me and Katie Bell."

Weasley is still glaring at me when he says, "No, actually. I just finished speaking with Harry and Mr. Acorn." His lips twist into something that must be "smug" on him. "Seems like Magical Transport's Keeper has fallen ill today, and instead of canceling the event all together, Acorn's asked me to step in tomorrow."

I show him what "smug" is. I return the smirk tenfold.

He's a lousy Keeper, and I plan on reinforcing that with him tomorrow.

"Oh, wonderful."

Oh, Granger was still here.

"Yes, wonderful," I repeat. "It's so nice that they'll let in just anybody… when there's a need like that."

"Yes, evidently." He nods in my direction.

I smile at him. He's gotten better at this since Hogwarts.

She rips the black ribbon from the wheel, bringing both of our attention back to her as she scrambles to finish wrapping.

I won't be able to give it to her here. I frown as Weasley steps closer to the counter.

"Buying a Halloween gift for someone?" he asks, like it's something to tease me for.

Her strong fingers pull the ribbon tight and flip the book over.

But the idea of Weasley knowing I've given her a gift…

“Yes,” I say. “Someone special to me.”

I glance up at him, ready to tell him more about how important the recipient of this book is, perhaps drop a few imagined details about her strong hands and her shapely hips—

Granger snorts.

Both of us turn to look at her.

She blushes, and quickly finishes with the bow, dropping the present into a Cornerstone bag.

“Here. Thank you.”

Her eyes beg me to just go away, but not so fast, Granger.

“Oh, thank *you,* Granger.” I smile at her, the charm I give to Skeeter, and Mathilda, and Jeannette and Jacqueline. She blinks at me. I turn to Weasley, letting that smile fade slowly. “I’ll see you on the field tomorrow, Weasley.”

“Looking forward to it, Malfoy.”

And really, it was *his* fault for trying to have the last word.

I take the bag from her, and reach across him, grabbing up a mint – *Miss Granger discovered that Icicle Pops were Mr. Malfoy’s favorite after-dinner mint, and personally stocks the register at Cornerstone with them* – and twist it between my fingers as Weasley’s small mind tries to comprehend.

“’Til tomorrow,” I sing.

I’m popping the mint between my lips, not daring to glance back.

~*~

Monday, September 2, 1996

The scent of her hair is overwhelming today. She must have done something to it.

Or perhaps it’s that I haven’t been in her proximity for two months, and the scent of her has faded from my mind.

It’s the first day of classes, and she’s already bouncing on her heels, begging Slughorn to give her house points for reading ahead.

And as much as I’ve prepared for today, as much as I’ve meditated and closed my mind and focused on my task this year, I still can’t look away from her.

“It’s Polyjuice Potion, sir.” She correctly identifies the roiling cauldron in front of her. Her eyes brighten when Slughorn agrees.

I've tried not to think of her since I received my assignment. Severus is pleased with my progress, my ability to separate her from the mission, but that was in the Manor, before school started. Before I shared classes with her again, and before the scent of her smothered the rooms I was in.

"It's Amortentia!"

I look up at the sound of her cheery voice. She's standing in front of a cauldron barely five paces from me. The blood drains from my face as I watch her and the professor rattle off information about the love potion.

The love potion that's been wafting the scent of her hair towards me.

She's bubbling, preening under Slughorn's attention. It's always nice to watch her in class, when she's proud and bursting with knowledge, and she's not aware of eyes on her.

"—and it's supposed to smell differently to each of us, according to what attracts us, and I can smell freshly mown grass and new parchment and –"

She cuts off, blushing. Probably about to say something foolish about the smell of Weasley's feet or Potter's armpits. Or Gilderoy Lockhart's morning breath.

Or more likely, something resembling Weasley's aftershave. I clench my jaw, and turn my eyes to find him, see if he's grown a brain over the summer. If he's possibly smelling her hair throughout the room as well.

I find a ginger head on the other side of the room, across from me, Granger in the middle of us. How poetic.

I lift my gaze to see if he's heard her slip, her almost confession.

He's watching me, eyes tight. His arms across his chest, he looks at her once, then back at me.

I scowl back at him. Then turn my head away, wondering what my face was doing as she answered questions and blushed and described the qualities of a love potion.

I resolve to visit Severus's office tonight. I'm underprepared for the beginning of the term.

I manage to make a remark to Theo next to me when Slughorn asks her if she's related to Hector Dagworth-Granger, sneering about her dirty blood.

~*~

Sunday, October 31, 1999

I haven't heard from her.

I thought I would have heard from her by now.

I pull on my undershirt, and pack up any clothes I'd like to wear after the match.

Maybe she threw the gift away. She took one look at it and became so furious that she didn't even read the card.

I spray my cologne, apply my sunblock cream, tousle my hair.

Maybe she and Weasley are still laughing at me.

I grab my cloak and head downstairs.

Maybe she never got a chance to open it. She and Weasley have been wrapped up in each other all evening.

I take my broom from Mippy and head through the front door, past the gardens and to the main gates. I walk twenty more paces and feel the Apparition wards dissolve. I Disapparate.

I'm the first one to the field. I check my timepiece. 6:30AM.

Perhaps I was a bit overzealous.

I drop my bag, discard my cloak, and jump on my broom, wearing only a thin shirt. The wind bites at me but I use this time to warm up, executing complex moves to strain my muscles, Quidditch plays I haven't needed since I was a Seeker.

I practice my version of a Wronski Feint, something I've been trying to execute for years since I saw Viktor Krum pull one at the Quidditch World Cup when I was fourteen. Potter got quite good at it over the years too – not that I'd ever tell him that – but I'd never had the stones to try the move in a real match. If I couldn't pull it off, and crashed into the ground in front of everyone in the school… Well that wouldn't be worth it.

I hurtle as close to the ground as I dare – not as low as Krum would go – and pull up sharply, my knees grazing the grass.

I hear a *pop!*

I look down and several players from Magical Transport are arriving. I see a red head among them.

I start my cool down, simple circles around the field, as several D.M.T. players jump on their brooms. About five minutes later, Weasley and Potter and she-Weasley are at the edge of the field now, near my bag. I drop and walk back towards them. Ginny is stretching, while Potter gets ready to mount his broom to warm up. I glance up to the stands and see Granger sauntering up, trying to find seating.

"Robes are in the cabins, Malfoy," Potter says as he takes off.

I grab up my bag and cloak, noticing that while his sister is stretching, doing sit ups, running in place, Weasley is simply standing there, taking in the field.

I wonder if he's even going to bother warming up, or if that's beneath a professional Quidditch player like himself.

I turn to the cabins and hear, "Fancy flying, Malfoy." I look back. Weasley is surveying the field, arms crossed. "You've certainly kept up. Didn't know they had a Quidditch pitch in Azkaban."

I feel my already heated blood start to boil. I narrow my eyes at him. I see Ginny Weasley stop mid-sit up, and stare at her brother. She opens her mouth but I can handle this myself, thank you.

"They don't," I say calmly, watching Weasley's self-satisfied grin as he keeps his eyes on the field. "I'm so glad to be back at it. I really can't thank Granger enough for getting me out."

His eye twitches.

I turn to head to the cabins, briefly seeing Ginny Weasley's brows pop up.

Forty-five minutes later and we're all changed into our uniforms. Potter's giving us the pep talk, but I'm concentrating on leveling my breathing. Goldstein says that Skeeter is out there. A huge crowd.

I'm not nervous for the publicity or the stadium. I just desperately want to score one on Weasley. Just one. Maybe Skeeter's photographer will catch just the moment, and I'll ask her office for the original, just to frame it next to my bed.

"And don't let the crowd get to you," Potter says to us. "Just keep the plays as we've always done them. Ron's a great Keeper, a professional player, but he has his weaknesses, just like all of us –"

"He can be an arrogant hothead," Ginny says. A few of them laugh.

"And he favors the middle and right hoop," I say.

It's quiet, and I see Potter looking at me.

"He does?" Ginny's brows pull together.

I nod. Potter looks like he's considering the new information.

Just then our referee walks in. "Everybody ready?"

It's Oliver Wood. My immediate reaction is disdain. A Gryffindor ref to favor the Gryffindor players.

It takes me a moment to realize that *I* am one of those Gryffindor players, dressed in red and everything.

"Alright," Potter says, as Wood leaves. "I'm hoping for a fifty point lead by the forty-five minute mark, and an eighty point lead at the whistle!"

The team cheers. I focus my energy on re-lacing my trainers.

At eight on the dot we rocket out of the cabin. The crowd *is* large. I haven't flown before this big of a crowd since Hogwarts. I keep my eyes off of the spot where I saw Granger choosing her seats earlier.

We come to a mid-air circle around Wood. He makes some joke about how proud Madam Hooch would be of all of us playing on the same field again. Eleven broomsticks laugh. I find that my gloves need tightening.

I'm centering my mind, trying to get rid of any wandering thought that isn't about my broom, the wind, the hoops.

I wonder if they spent the night together last night. So soon after Rolf Scamander?

I brush that away, like dirt under a rug.

I look up at Weasley and find him waving at someone in the crowd. I don't need to look to know she's waving back at him.

Keepers to their posts. Beaters to theirs. Wood tosses the Quaffle, and we're off. Magical Transport takes control of the Quaffle first, per Potter's strategy, and I'm tailing a dark-skinned woman down the field, giving her room to be open.

Our Keeper is quite good. He blocks the first shot easily, swooping down to grab the Quaffle and tosses it out to Ginny Weasley. She dodges a Bludger and swings low, tossing the Quaffle blindly upwards, and there's Potter to catch it. The Chasers are trying to readjust, having swept low with her, and I'm heading toward the hoops as a backup. Potter swerves, aiming for the left hoop and I see Weasley jerk the wrong direction before lurching back and barely batting away the throw.

Weasley sends Potter a playful jibe while Potter rolls his eyes, smiling. Potter turns to me as we head back down the field. He nods, seeing firsthand that Weasley favors the right hoop. I raise a brow and zoom away.

Ten minutes later I'm zipping down the field with the Quaffle. I'm three seconds away from the hoops, and Weasley is ready for me, tense, arms in the air. The D.M.T. Chaser is tailing me, and I see her pull back.

Which means a Bludger is coming my way. I look to Weasley, wondering if I can make it. He smiles.

"OPEN!" I hear over the wind, and I chuck the Quaffle in the direction I heard Ginny Weasley's voice, then diving low. The Bludger kisses my ear.

I wouldn't have made it. The Bludger would have taken my head off.

I look up to see the Quaffle go through – the left hoop again – as he tries to lunge for it.

I grin, as the crowd cheers. The Bludger ricochets back towards me and I swerve away, listening merrily as the Weasley siblings verbally assault each other.

The Quaffle gets tossed out, and I intercept it. My other two Chasers are already on defense, so I rocket toward the hoops, half a field away. I hear the crowd humming, and the smack of a Beater's bat against a ball. I come from the left, curving the Quaffle at the center hoop. Weasley almost misses it. His fingertips tilt it away.

He smirks at me, and I turn before I lose my focus. Reset. Players in place.

Magical Transport gets past us a few times, but our Keeper stops them. It's 10-0 and we're already twenty minutes in.

Every time Potter gets close to the hoops and doesn't score, Weasley shoots something smarmy at him. It's starting to grate him, I can tell. He takes it on the chin though.

One of the D.M.T. Beaters has it out for me. He's tailing me as close as the Chaser, always swinging Bludgers at me. His aim is good too. He four or five years ahead of us at Hogwarts. Slytherin, actually.

Potter calls out a play we've been practicing. All three of us will hurtle down the field at the same pace, tossing the Quaffle back and forth, trying to trick the Keeper and the defensive players.

Just before the Quaffle is thrown back in, I turn to the Beater who's been after me.

I wonder if this will be worth it…

"Oi, Williams!"

He glares at me.

"Now I know why Flint wouldn't let you on the team. Your aim is shit."

He narrows his eyes at me as the whistle blows. I take off, middle of our Chaser formation. Potter passes over my head to Ginny Weasley, Weasley dodges her Chaser and tosses to me.

I see her brother at the hoops, staring us down, waiting to see if we'll get taken out by Chasers or Bludgers. Waiting to see who will have the Quaffle once we're in throwing distance.

I toss back to Ginny Weasley, she quickly throws back to me and I toss over to Potter at the last minute.

I hear a whistling behind my head.

Williams's Bludger.

Potter aims for the right hoop, Weasley bats it away, and I dive, turning up in time to watch the Bludger aimed for my head narrowly miss Ron Weasley, smashing through the hoops,

splintering the wood and spraying everywhere.

Damn. So close. Good shot, Williams.

Wood's whistle blows. I look to the crowds, finding half the stadium on their feet.

I find her immediately. Sitting with Katie Bell, mouth open.

I wonder if she's concerned for him.

I drop to the grass, going to grab water from the cheery young girls manning the fountain, giving out paper cups.

"Close call there."

I turn, paper cup to my lips, and find Weasley. His eyes are hard as he grabs up a cup without a glance to the girls.

"Yes, it's a shame about the hoops." I glance up, seeing Wood trying to pull the pieces back together. "Williams's aim really needs some work." I toss the paper cup in the rubbish bag and move back toward my broom.

"If only your friends could see you now, Malfoy." He follows me. "In Gryffindor red, playing side-by-side with Harry Potter."

"Well, I'm sure they'll see it in the papers, Weasley," I chirp back. I turn to face him. He's prowling, waiting for the attack.

"I'm just sorry you don't have anyone rooting for you in the stands. To see all your fancy tricks," he taunts.

"I don't know," I say, and my eyes drift to her where she's noticed the two of us. "I think I'm pretty well represented today." I look back at him and he's seething.

I can do this all day, Weasley.

He steps into me. I hold my ground.

"I think it's time you found a new bookshop, Malfoy."

I hate that he's still taller than me. And he knows it.

"I quite like Cornerstone Books, actually." I tilt my head at him.

"Don't you have a whole library at home?"

"I do. It's *huge*."

He doesn't miss the innuendo. His nostrils flare.

"I'm sure it's not that big."

“No, it is. Ask Granger,” I say. “She’s seen it.”

His eyes are dark. I see arms ripple as he clenches his fists. That’s good, Weasley. Hit me.

“She’s been over a few times now,” I continue.

He looks at her, a quick tilt of his head, and he steps into me again.

“Stay. Away. From her.” Low and a pretty good job at threatening.

“Why?” I say calmly. “You’ve stayed away enough for the both of us.”

He shoves me.

I smile.

“Ireland’s a long way away, Weasley.” My skin is humming. “I was just keeping her warm for you.”

I see the punch coming a mile away. I welcome it.

He cracks across my jaw.

Thank you, Weasley.

Now, it’s my turn.

My head swims back to front and I charge him, knocking his feet out, making sure to land hard on him. I hear the air leave his lungs, and I get enough distance to land my fist against his jaw. He pushes at my face, and I get on top of him. I can’t see anything but his freckles and blue eyes and then her body under him, running her fingers through his wiry hair, moaning for him.

He hits me hard against my eye. I knock his head again with my fist. I’m about to slam down, break his nose, when two arms pull me back, and I’m tilted away, scrambling to my feet, fighting to get back to him.

“That’s enough!” Potter’s voice against my ear. It brings me back to the Quidditch field, the grass, the uniforms.

He’s dragging me back by my arms. I can see Weasley’s blood from his split lip and I almost smile. He’s up and running for me, no one to stop him. He gut-punches me.

My vision is black. I hear yelling. I can’t breathe in.

My arms are released and I fall to my knees. Then someone is lifting me, throwing my arm over their shoulder and turning me away. I stumbled to keep up with them.

We’re in the cabins before I realize it’s Potter. He’s murmuring apologies about not meaning to hold my arms back, and didn’t think he’d sucker punch you, and let’s get ice.

“I’m sorry I ruined the game,” I wheeze.

I look up, half my vision shut by swelling. He shakes his head. “You two on the same field was a bad idea to begin with.”

“You and I do fine,” I say.

“Well, yes. I’m a saint.”

I chuckle, and it hurts my stomach.

Ginny Weasley bursts through the doors. I ready myself for another Weasley attack.

She takes one look at me and giggles, her hand coming up to cover her mouth.

“Well,” she says. “Whose was bigger?”

She cackles; I almost smile.

“Ginny…” Potter whines, his face twisting in disgust.

The rest of our team files in. We’ll be rescheduling the match.

I apologize to them. Most of them shrug it off.

I shower slowly, wincing as the water hits my eye. When I’m dressed, Goldstein has a cream for it to help the cut.

Potter waits for me. We exit and there’s a small crowd there, but then she’s in front of me, eyes on fire.

“Are you alright?” she asks.

I see her take in my face, my bruises. More pity from the Golden Girl. I frown down at her.

“I’m fine.”

“Good.” She nods at me. She *shoves* me, and it makes me stumble harder than when Weasley did it. I fall against the cabin door. “What the hell is wrong with you?!”

My eyes are wide. “Me?”

“Yes! Why are you giving Skeeter more ammunition?!” She shoves me *again!* “You know the pictures of you two *brawling* will be all over the papers tomorrow!”

I haven’t thought of Skeeter and the photographer this whole time, but suddenly they are right behind her, taking a picture of us now.

“And what makes you think that was all about you, Granger?” I scowl, but her eyes are doing that thing again. That fire thing.

“Of *course* it was about me, because *you* can’t leave well enough alone!” She’s panting, heaving angry air in and spewing acid back out at me.

I roll my eyes at her. She’s not nearly as important as she thinks she is after all. “For your information, I’ve been aching to pop him since the day we met.”

“Yes, and I’m sure whatever you said to get him to hit you first had nothing to do with me.” She rolls her eyes back at me. “You’ve been baiting him all weekend!”

Her voice is doing that screechy thing. That thing that isn’t attractive at all.

“Baiting him?” I smile. “I sure I don’t know what you mean—“

“Oh, please, Malfoy. The *mint?”*

She puts her hands on her hips and I can’t help but smirk.

“Those *are* my favorite mints, Granger. However did you know?”

“And you knew he’d be with me when your *present* arrived –“

He’d be with me. My jaw clenches.

“And you’re welcome for that, by the way,” I say. “Or have you not figured it out yet.”

It’s like I’ve physically hit her. Her jaw drops. “’Have I not figured it out!?’ Of *course,* I have! Even someone as vapid as your *Tuesday* girl could figure that out –“

“Oh, I was curious, seeing as I received no ‘thank you’ card –“

“Well *thank you,* Malfoy, for swooping in and *saving* me from my ignorance—“

“It’s back to Malfoy, is it?” I watch as her cheeks bloom with heat, and her eyes dance across my face. “I thought we were getting somewhere, Granger.”

“Yes, when you’re being an absolute *moron,* it’s Malfoy,” she hisses at me, still panting like I’m making her run a marathon.

“And when is it Draco?” I drawl, looking down at her with careful eyes as she huffs.

“When you’re being an absolute *asshole!”* She shoves me again, and I almost grab her arms, pull them to me. I glare down at her and she points a finger in my face. “Don’t you *dare* bring me into this petty behavior again.”

“I didn’t bring you into it at all, Granger. He did,” I seethe. It’s always going to be my fault, isn’t it.

“If you want to hit him, hit him. Don’t use me to get him to hit you first.”

Well, she has me there.

She marches away, even as Skeeter takes pictures and tries to ask her questions. Weasley's just returning, and he tries to say something to her. At least we're both in the doghouse. I watch as she goes, and I'm breathing deep, half-hard, and watching her hips as she stomps across the grass.

I run a hand down my face, forgetting about my eye, and I wince.

I turn to grab my bag, and Potter's watching me. He snaps out of whatever he'd been thinking, and grabs my bag for me, helping me get it on my shoulder.

"Thanks," I say. I walk away, Disapparating before Skeeter can corner me. I go to a bar.

I wake up the next morning to an owl tapping at my window. My head is splitting, and my eye is swollen shut.

I took a Dreamless Sleep potion at 6PM, and now twelve hours later, I'm finally rousing. Mother laid out a pain potion and a concealing cream last night on my nightstand.

The owl taps again.

I go to my window. The nondescript bird flies in.

A letter. I rip it open. A page of the *Daily Prophet* and a small note. The newspaper catches my eye, and I see that it's today's date. I turn it open.

"THE FIGHT FOR HERMIONE GRANGER'S HEART!"
by Rita Skeeter.

It's the front page. There I am, tackling Weasley to the ground. Like an animal.

I see her in the picture, at the edge of the field, screaming for us to stop. I see her shoving me against the cabins, my eyes drinking her in.

Nowhere in the paper does it say that Draco Malfoy is opening a consulting firm, becoming his own man, and clawing his way out of his father's shadow.

I pull the small note. It's not addressed, or signed, but I know Father's handwriting.

I thought you were announcing on November 1st.

I blink my good eye. It's not a question.

It's an accusation.

No word from him for weeks. Nothing when the Fortescue's pictures were printed. No follow up on our discussion last month.

The Howlers I receive for the rest of the day don't weigh as heavy on me as that one sentence.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for your patience!

Sunday, November 16, 1997

The fire in the common room is dying. It's almost three in the morning and I'm considering whether to stoke it.

I haven't been able to sleep for a few weeks. I feel the war coming. The weight of it keeps me awake.

I don't know what Blaise's excuse is, though.

He nodded off an hour ago, sitting across from me, reading his History of Magic homework.

He hasn't been tapped for the Death Eaters. He doesn't have family relations to pull him towards the war. All he has is his mother and her new husband, for as long as this one lasts.

I watch him sleep. I envy him.

The dungeon wall opens, and Theo Nott appears, moving quietly before he sees me watching him.

"What's kept you up, then?" he says, taking note of Blaise passed out.

"I could ask you the same," I hum. "Or should I ask 'who?'"

Theo stops, and before he's allowed himself to blush, he says, "Hufflepuff." He smiles, a tight grin. "She's pure-blood, I assure you."

He flops into a chair, and I decide not to press further, knowing that the only pure-blood Hufflepuff in our year is Ernie Macmillan.

“Anything new to report?” Theo asks. He looks around the room for curious ears – even though it is clear we are the only two conscious occupants of the common room – and asks, “Anything on Potter since the Ministry break in?”

I shake my head. “Nothing from Father.”

I look back to the fire. Theo is always trying to get into the thick of things.

“I’ve heard something interesting.”

I look to him. His brows are raised and he’s examining his cuticles.

What an irritating little closeted queer.

“Yes?” I take the bait.

He looks around the room again, eyes landing on the sleeping Blaise, then back to me.

“Have you heard about an Auction?” he asks.

A year ago, my eye would have twitched.

Two years ago, I would have taken a deep breath and centered my thoughts to find a lie.

“Yes,” I say. “I’ve heard rumors.”

Theo grins. “I’m thinking of asking for a Mudblood for my birthday.”

He laughs.

I grin back.

“Or a Weasley,” he says. “Make them clean my house. Polish my shoes.”

I’m about to make some comment about the majority of the Weasley options being men… who would have limited purposes for *most* blokes, when Blaise beats me to it.

“Could have them working in a loin cloth for you, Theo,” says Blaise’s groggy voice. He sits up and rubs his eyes. “Better hope they’re auctioning off the older two. Infinitely more handsome than the rest.” He finds the energy to wink at him.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Theo’s jaw tenses. His eyes dart to me, then back to Blaise.

“Nothing, Theo. Nothing.” Blaise closes his book and stretches his arms over his head. “I’m *sure* you meant Ginny Weasley. Having her slave for you and bring you meals in bed.”

So, Blaise is already aware of the Auction. Or is not surprised by it. I concentrate on emptiness while they bicker.

Theo simmers in his chair. “The Weasley chit is too expensive. Both she and Granger are starting at 10,000 each.”

Dolohov's words reaffirm themselves. 10,000 to begin with.

My stomach pulls.

And Blaise looks over at me. Then back to Theo.

"That much?"

"Yeah," Theo pouts. "Too expensive for a Weasley. She'll get up to 20,000 most likely. Ridiculous. Just 'cause she's Potter's girlfriend."

My eyes are set on him. I don't bother checking with Blaise. He's already watching me.

"And how about Granger then?" Blaise asks. He leans back in his chair. "How much is the Golden Girl going for?"

"Probably twenty-five, maybe thirty." Theo gives a dramatic yawn. Now that he doesn't have my undivided attention, he's ready for bed. "What's it to you Blaise? You don't have the galleons for them."

"I've got galleons enough. And *I* don't need to worry about my inheritance being bound to my wedding day, like some, Nott." Blaise gives him a lazy smile. "Besides. Me and Draco could split one."

I look to him. His dark eyes are smiling at me, digging into me.

"Who do you have your eye on, Draco?" Theo says.

"No one in particular," I say. "We'll have to see who the Snatchers drag in." I stand, stretching. "Gentlemen. I'm off to bed."

Theo looks like I just stole his exit line, and Blaise looks at me like a crystal ball, finding all the answers he was searching for.

I descend the stairs, resigned to lay awake in my four-poster.

30,000. Plus 5,000 if she's a virgin.

I ignore Crabbe and Goyle's snoring, shutting the curtains around myself.

I can't trust Theo's word. He's not connected. I'll need to do some digging over the holidays.

And hope that she doesn't do anything stupid in the meantime.

~*~

Tuesday, November 2, 1999

I'm tapping my thumb against the table as Katya picks at her salad.

"Why are we meeting without cameras, Draco?" she asks.

I look up at her. She chews silently, her lips pressed together in a delicate way.

“I needed to speak with you,” I say. “About the public affection again.”

She blinks at me, and sips from her water glass. “Again?” She lifts her brows. “I’ve have *hate mail* over breaking Hermione Granger’s heart from our *last* romp. I’ve had distant relatives writing letters, edging their way onto the wedding guest list.”

She smiles brightly. I stare blankly.

She looks down at her salad. “What did your father say?”

I straighten my napkin.

“Nothing.” I push my fork back into place. “He didn’t say a word.”

I look up at her, and I feel like she’s one of the only people in my life who understands what that means. She takes a deep breath. It circulates between us.

I continue, “I need to distance myself as much as possible from yesterday’s article. From the convoluted love triangle Skeeter has concocted.” My tongue runs across my teeth. “It’s juvenile, really. And I’m trying to present myself as a responsible adult here.”

“And you think responsible adults embrace each other for the cameras to see?” She smirks at me.

“I think getting serious about one woman is a responsible thing. A mature choice.” I check in with her.

“Are you sure you’re getting serious with the right woman?” she says, winking at me. I breathe. “The more you flirt with Hermione Granger, the more public opinion will shift—“

“If you’re not comfortable I understand. We can continue to be seen at dinners.”

It’s too abrupt. I shouldn’t have jumped it. I take a long sip of wine, ignoring her eyes.

“Let me check with Andrei. I will let you know tomorrow.”

~*~

Friday, November 5, 1999

I’m thinking of Pansy, actually.

My fingers wrap around Katya’s hip, my other hand tracing her arm.

I’m thinking of Pansy and how I really owe her some kind of apology.

Katya smiles at me before I press my lips to hers. She drags her hands up my chest and into my hair, pressing her body against me, and I’m thinking of how I wish I hadn’t tricked Pansy into this. Into posing.

Only it's a camera this time and not a bushy-haired prefect.

~*~

Saturday, November 6, 1999

It's a rough morning at Hodgley Field. Ginny Weasley has been promoted on the Harpies, so she'll be bowing out of the Ministry's Quidditch league. I wonder if it has anything to do with some questions of whether Weasleys-who-don't-work-for-the-Ministry should be allowed to play on the Ministry Quidditch league.

Not that I know anything about that anonymous letter.

Goldstein wants to try out Chaser in her absence. He's shit.

I'm watching Turpin, our remaining Beater, try to train a willowy, thirty-year-old witch from the Investigation Department with absolutely no upper-body strength to hit the Bludger with the Beater bat. She's quick on her broom, clearly an excellent Seeker, and I'm wondering about switching and letting her play Chaser just so I can beat some things up on the weekends.

She knocks the Bludger right at me, like she's hearing my complaints. I duck.

She smirks.

Touché.

Potter is clearly getting nervous about the quality of his team. I'll be gone in a month too. Part of me can't wait to get the fuck out of the Ministry with their worthless interdepartmental rivalries, and part of me relishes the competition of it, like at Hogwarts.

He's scribbling at a notebook of plays and drills when I head to the showers. I don't even bother to dry my hair in my haste to leave quickly before he corners me and talks defensive strategies.

I Apparate to the hill outside the gates of the Manor, feeling the wind lick at the wet hair near my ears. I drop my things in the entryway, tucking my bag and broom into the nook we store coats in at parties. I'm famished so I head to the kitchen.

Down the hall, I can hear my mother's voice from the library. Talking to her elf? Perhaps she has company, but it's awfully early for guests. I should let her know that I'm home.

I'm steps from the library doors when they explode open, and Hermione Granger rockets through them, pausing to look at the bust of my father, before her feet carry her straight into my chest. My breath leaves me.

Her eyes are wide and wet. My mother has made her cry? She's gasping.

"What's happened?"

My hands itch to grab her, hold her still. Run down her arms to her fingers.

“I’m – Draco, I’m so, so sorry for everything. I – I didn’t mean any of this,” she says. She turns and runs all the way to the fireplaces. Her hair is braided again.

My neck is still warm from the sound of my name. I turn to see my mother, in her library, at the alcohol cabinet.

“Well, Draco,” she whispers, swirling a glass of gin. “Your father’s managed to ruin everything.”

I watch as she tips the glass into her mouth, and my brain wraps around what she just said.

“Father?” The heat leaves me. I feel sand in my throat. “What does he have to do with her?”

She pours herself another. A rarity. This one she sips. She turns to the window. “She went to see him today.”

My ribs tighten. “What,” I growl.

She shakes her head. “I misjudged—“

And I’m running. I follow her path to the fireplaces. Maybe she’s still looking for the Floo powder. And the hall is empty. The front door is cracked and I throw it open, finding a small figure bolting away from the Manor, hair wild and falling out of her plait as she throws open the iron gates.

I watch as she stops, tries to Apparate and then continues running. I stumble down the front stairs, entering the gardens and darting down the drive. She’s running for the top of the hill and as I reach the iron gates, she tries again, and disappears. I hang off the gates, gasping.

Father…

There are countless ways Lucius could bring her to tears. But the *best* way…

I stomp up the drive, slamming the front door, and march to the library. Mother is still at the window.

“I’ll fix this Draco,” she says to her glass.

“You will do no such thing,” I hiss. Her lips purse, and she takes a sip. “What was your masterplan, Mother?”

I watch her long neck move as she swallows, still looking out the window.

“He promised to stay out of the way. To allow your business to move forward and to not interfere with the finances any longer. As long as he could meet her.”

I laugh. And I make it cruel on purpose. “You’ve lost your touch, Mother.” She shifts her weight. “I already had my deal with him. I had this under control,” I spit.

“I know, Draco,” she coos. “I wanted to take that burden from you, that’s all.” She brings her hand to her cheek, cooling her warming skin.

“What did she say.”

Mother narrows her eyes at the grounds, her right hand swirls clockwise, her left fingers come to her lips. “I pushed her. It was too much.” She’s thinking aloud, not speaking to me.

“Mother.”

“And the ring was too much…” she whispers.

“Mother!” I’m still standing in the doorway of the library and she’s still at the window, the entire room between us. She looks at me.

“She made it clear that the two of you are not in a relationship.”

I watch her as she pities me. Naïve, stupid woman. It’s a fact, not a death sentence.

“And she made it clear that you never will be.”

My eye twitches.

My skin is tight. My mind…

I choose yellow bricks, laying mortar with a small hand tool. The first row is easy. Placing her in a corner and stacking until I cannot see her curls.

My mother watches me. She twists her lips.

It’s easier to look at facts now. Now that she is hidden behind a hasty wall of yellow bricks.

She knows.

He told her how I wanted her. How I would have kept her.

He told her the truth about the Auction.

~*~

Thursday, January 1, 1998

My grandmother gave her eyes to all her children. But her hair and her nose went to Bellatrix.

Now that I’ve met my aunt, it jolts me to see her so thoroughly represented in this older woman I’ve been seeing twice a year for all my life.

“Draco, darling.” My grandmother begins to stand.

“No need, *ma chérie.*” I come to her side and guide her to sit back down. She smiles at me. The only grandson. The only *grandchild,* if you don’t count…

“I’m so happy you’re here.” She brushes my hair back. “Getting long.” She flicks my nose like she used to.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t see each other at Christmas,” I say, taking my seat across from her in the parlor. “It’s been…” I think of the Dark Lord, slithering through my hallways and the Death Eaters eating my food.

“Inconvenient,” she finishes for me. She’s scowling at her teacup, and I hope it’s directed at the roaches swarming the Manor, not her family. It will make this infinitely easier.

“Yes,” I say. “I’m missing a bit of the freedom I used to have…” I check in with her eyes, waiting for her to chastise me for speaking ill of the Dark Lord’s plans. “…but I’m trying to accommodate the changes.”

She purses her lips, like Mother does, and nods, saying nothing.

“How is your father adjusting?” She sips her tea, watching me. “I was sorry to hear you and your mother had to be without him for all that time.”

Not “sorry he was wrongfully imprisoned” or “sorry to hear he failed the Dark Lord.” Sorry for me and mother.

“I was at school, but Mother was lonely, I know. I think she much appreciated your letters, and the time she could spend with you, though short.”

Her house elf offers me the tray of scones. My favorites are there. I take one, but my stomach is thundering.

“I’ve grown closer with Bellatrix,” I say, testing. She looks up at me with steady eyes. “I’ve learned much from her.”

A small muscle in her jaw moves.

“Do tell her hello,” she says. And sips her tea.

Intriguing. And helpful.

She watches me. Knowing that I’m in the middle of a monologue, and still have not hit the climax.

So I dive in.

“While I was at school last year, Nymphadora was there. As security.” I look up and her face gives me nothing. The thin skin around her eyes doesn’t move. “I didn’t get to know her, of course, but… we saw each other.”

She sets her teacup down on her saucer, and pats her mouth.

I break a corner off my scone. Prepare myself for the next step.

“She’s pregnant, you know,” she says.

I look up. My grandmother is pouring herself another cup of tea. She doesn’t meet my eyes.

Do the Death Eaters know this? Is this common knowledge? Is this even valuable information? My eyes drop to the piece of scone in my fingers.

How does grandmother even know? I look at her eyes. They’re on me.

How does she know unless she heard it from…

“That’s wonderful news.” I smile. She nods.

Grandmother Druella and I used to play a game when I was six or seven. Whenever I wanted more sweets after dinner, or another slice of pie, she would look directly into Mother’s eyes, starting a strange conversation about gardening, or the German Minister for Magic, and she would tear Mother’s gaze away from the pie or the candy jar until I was safe to slide in and take what I wanted. We even tried this when I was thirteen, playing cards with Father. I swindled him out of fifty galleons that night.

It isn’t until this very moment that I wonder if it is Legilimency.

I swallow, and do something I haven’t done purposefully since I had my wand pointed at a feeble, grey-haired wizard, clutching to the side of the Astronomy Tower, lowering, lowering – lower my walls.

I’m afraid, Grandmother.

She blinks at me. And sends the thought into me, like Severus does.

Of course you are, dear child.

My throat chokes on a gasp, gurgling. My eyes sting.

I have to pull myself out of her gaze. I look down at my scone, crumbled into pieces by my grip.

“Draco,” she coos. I lift my eyes, wet and blurred. “Is your mother safe?”

“For now,” I reply. “I have no reason to fear for her immediate safety. She is ever the gracious host.” I grab my teacup, hearing the saucer rattle.

I sip my tea, trying to get ahold of myself. I look at her.

It’s not us I’m afraid for, I think. *There’s someone I…*

Even in the privacy of my own mind I can’t say it. A jewelry box sits unopened in its corner.

I think of Greyback, Yaxley, and Dolohov moving through a front door on a quiet street, wands at the ready.

I blink. She nods. She's seen it.

She's Muggleborn.

Grandmother tilts her head, not expecting this. I feel a whisper of her mind reaching out searching for her.

I shut down, slamming up a wall, pushing her out.

She looks down at her tea in apology. I run my hand through my hair, ruining the style.

"What brings you here today, Draco?"

I calm my racing heart and say, "There may be a time in the future where I need financial assistance." I look up at her. "And I was wondering if I could come to you."

She studies me. "You know I will always look out for you, Draco," she says. "But to take a large sum from a family member, after your seventeenth birthday…" She squints at me, her cold blue eyes trying to figure me out. "Well, due to the old magic, it will forfeit your right to your inheritance –"

"I'm aware."

Her brows lift. "How much do you think you'll need?"

"About 35,000 galleons."

~*~

Sunday, November 7, 1999

She's not at work on Saturday or Sunday. I swing by Cornerstone both days. Morty tells me she's ill. On Saturday I buy a book to not look too desperate. On Sunday I don't bother.

I can see it all in my head.

Miss Granger. So good of you to stop by.

Mr. Malfoy. I was so surprised by your invitation.

I slog through the Sunday traffic in Diagon Alley, bumping shoulders.

I thought I should meet you in person. My wife is under the impression that you and my son are in a relationship—

No, no. He would tease her. Draw it out.

I thought it was time we officially met. Narcissa is quite fond of you.

I tumble into the Leaky, plopping onto a barstool.

I'm quite fond of her.

And my son is quite fond of you as well.

Oh, that can't be true. He really can't stand me, Mr. Malfoy.

I'm two firewhiskies in. I order a third.

Nonsense. He's fancied you for years. Quite obsessive about it, really.

Tom stops me before my fourth. I try to pay double to bargain for one more shot. He sends me out.

I don't know what you mean, Mr. Malfoy.

Don't you? The lengths he would have gone to obtain you, and you don't know?

I stumble into Muggle London. This is nicer. No one knows me out here. No one knows what I would have done.

<u>Obtain</u> me?

Surely, you've heard about the Auction, Miss Granger. A bedroom was made up in the Manor just for you, before the war ended. You would have slept next door to him in your pretty cage forever.

A Muggle pub appears before me, and luckily I have just enough Muggle money to get one last drink. I ask for a firewhisky and the man behind the bar raises a brow.

Your son told me about an Auction, but not like that. He said he'd sell me off.

Oh, no, Miss Granger. He would have kept you all to himself. In a few years' time, he would have married a pure-blood girl, and kept you on the side, like the common whore you are.

Someone tries to speak to me at the Muggle pub, and I ignore them.

The only thing I'm curious about, Miss Granger, is how long he would have been able to keep his hands off of you. Sleeping just next door to him. Tempting him. After all, he should get his money's worth.

I slap my money down on the bar, and stumble into the sunlight. Muggle automobiles everywhere, and I just wish I could Apparate.

So, you'll understand, Miss Granger, why I'm so curious as to your current relationship with my son. Narcissa has alluded to your involvement, and I must admit, I thought you had higher standards.

We're not in a relationship. And we never will be.

I'm in an alley. I'm heaving, leaning against rubbish receptacles and letting the firewhisky leave my body. My head is pounding. And I can't open my eyes.

If I splinch myself, then so be it. I need to get out of here.

I pull my wand and send myself home. Minus my shoes.

~*~

Monday, November 8, 1999

My *Daily Prophet* article comes out Monday. It's exactly as Skeeter would have printed it last week. No mention of Hermione Granger or Ron Weasley. Or of any public intoxication yesterday.

I glance over it before heading into the office.

People smile at me. They congratulate me. No Howlers today. Some resumes, which make me laugh.

Potter stares at me when I get to my desk. Like he has something to say. Like he's itching to ask me something. Or maybe hit me.

I'd welcome either.

A few hours later I head down to the courtrooms. Jugson. I've had limited interactions with him, but there's no possible way he was Imperius'd.

I should have taken a Pepper-Up Potion. I probably look as hungover as I feel.

I'm leaning against the wall of the lift when it slows and stops at Level 4. I raise my eyes to find her on the precipice, staring at me.

I wait. Wait for her to hit me again. To spit on me.

She enters the lift and stands with me.

I wait for her to hiss at me or request that I exit at the next floor.

"Good morning."

I blink at her.

Why? How could she greet me?

I'm opening my mouth to wish her a good morning when O'Connor joins us at Level 5. He talks my ear off. He congratulates me on the article. He reminisces about his desires to leave the Ministry. I feel like he's about to list off his special skills when the lift slows for the Atrium, and he starts to exit.

She's going to the courtrooms too. For Jugson.

We're alone in the lift again. Is it too late to say good morning?

"It was an excellent article, really. Skeeter did a wonderful job introducing Malfoy Consulting Group to the Wizarding World."

I'm watching her, waiting.

"Thank you."

"And congratulations on Witch Weekly." She laughs. She thinks so lowly of the periodical that it's barely a compliment at all.

I follow her out of the lift, holding the gate open for her. All I can hear is the click of her shoes against the stones. She stands against the wall I lean on. It's better this way. I don't have to stare at her.

But I still turn my head and watch her. She avoids me, staring at the stones.

"You weren't at Cornerstone yesterday," I whisper, the sound loud in the small hall.

She holds her breath. I wait for her chest to fall on the exhale and it doesn't.

"No, I was ill." She won't look at me. "Was Morty able to help you?"

I wasn't at Cornerstone for Morty. Or for books. I come there for you.

I turn to face her. I have to know the damage. I have to begin to fix it.

"I heard you went to see my father."

She finally exhales.

"I did," she says. "It was very nice of him to want to meet with me."

I watch her. I wait. And nothing. That's all she feels she owes me.

I crack my knuckles. Shove the hair out of my face.

Maybe it is all she owes me.

"And you had a nice visit?"

She won't look at me. Like we've started from the beginning. Like I need to convince her I'm worthy of her eyes.

"Perfectly nice. I'd never truly met him." Her face turns to mine, finally meeting my gaze, just to deliver, "You're very similar."

It hits me like a blow to the cheek. I feel the muscles of my face react as such.

It's cold in my chest and I think I'll shuffle away now, but then I see the corner of her mouth smile.

She wants to hurt me. She wants to land a punch.

I step in to her, before she can look away from me.

"If I'd known about the meeting, I would have stopped it."

I never wanted you to know. To see what I am.

"My mother likes to meddle in things she has no business in. I apologize that you got wrapped up in it."

I promise I never would have touched you. I would have cut off my arm before touching you.

"I don't know what he said to you, but—"

"Why is your blood on my living room walls?" she says.

And my mind is blank.

This? This is what he told her?

I try to respond and there's no sound.

I had no idea my father knew about Yaxley's letters on her wall.

And he told her?

To prove I was a monster?

Or…?

"Miss Granger?" A voice calls for her. "Are you ready?"

"Quite."

She walks away from me. She feels like she's won. But no one told me the name of the game.

She wanted to hurt me.

But she still wished me good morning.

And she ran from my house, apologizing.

Draco, I'm so, so sorry for everything. I – I didn't mean any of this.

The oak door clicks closed behind her, and I'm alone in the hallway.

Maybe he hadn't told her about the Auction after all.

Maybe it was much worse than that.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

Thanks everyone for your patience! But I gift you with an extra long chapter.

I can't guarantee regular updates at this time unfortunately, but know that I don't abandon stories.

Thursday, June 13, 1996

My neck is getting sore from all the agreeable nodding.

Umbridge found me sneaking off to the kitchens, so I convinced her that I was just on my way to find her to discuss some of my suspicions. Primarily Gryffindor suspicions.

She's been preaching ever since. I nod my head again, humming in agreement.

"Quite right," I say. "And I'd wager that my father would be in full support of that decree."

She turns her small eyes on me, gleaming, and a clopping down the corridor pulls our focus.

Filch, running with his knees to his chest like always, comes darting by us.

"The poltergeist is messing with the school telescopes. Smearin' ink!" Filch's eyes bulge out of his head. "I'm on it, Headmistress!"

"High Inquisitor," she corrects. She giggles.

"High Inquisitor!" He salutes and prances away. Once he's out of sight around the stairs that lead to the Astronomy Tower, I turn back to her.

"Like I was saying." I push my hair back and she clears her throat. "My father is very impressed with all the work you've done here this year, ma'am. And once the school year is over, I do hope you can come by the Manor to meet him."

Umbridge's eyes sparkle, like I've just offered her the finest cut of meat.

"Umbridge! Er, Headmistress!" Weasley comes to a skidding halt in front of us.

"High Inquisitor," she says.

"Yes, High Inquisitor, or… yeah…"

He casts his eyes to me before returning to the Headmistr— *High Inquisitor.*

"Mr. Weasley?" Her prim voice lances through my ears.

"It's Peeves!" He points. "In the Transfiguration Department – mucking up everything!"

Umbridge doesn't move. "Peeves, you say?"

"Yeah! We gotta get a move on!" Weasley starts to track back toward the Transfiguration corridor.

I narrow my eyes at him. He glances at me.

"Mr. Weasley." Her voice is thin. "How is it that you know Peeves is in the Transfiguration corridor, when you yourself have just come from the opposite direction?"

Weasley blinks. Idiot.

"Well, mischief travels so fast here," he tries.

Umbridge glowers at him.

Suddenly, the sound of a dozen mewling cats. I jump, lifting my feet high like avoiding mice. There are no cats here. Weasley is doing the same, but Umbridge simply looks down at her wand, where the noise is coming from. Face paling. She turns a glare on Weasley.

"Expelliarmus!"

Weasley's wand flies from his pocket into Umbridge's tiny fist. Ropes explode from the tip of her wand to wrap around his middle, his freckly face wide and scared.

I watch with rapt attention as she advances on him.

"Mr. Malfoy," Umbridge says, handing me Weasley's wand. "Please fetch the rest of the Inquisitorial Squad and meet me at my office."

She grabs Weasley by his hair, forcing him to follow her down the hallway.

This… is the best day of my life.

I dash to the Great Hall, whistle for Crabbe and Goyle, and seconds later I have the pack of them, moving with me down the hall and begging for the story.

Ginny Weasley and Loony Lovegood are setting some sort of diversion. I keep one or two of my crew and set the rest of them to seizing the birds.

Umbridge is just arriving at her office from one side as we come from the other, still dragging Weasley by the hair. She shoves him to the ground and nods to me just before she slips open the door to her office.

I'm right on her tail when she whispers *"Expelliarmus!"* and Granger's wand goes clattering to the floor. She spins in shock, and I'm right there, slamming her back against the wall. My hand claps over her mouth, palm on her open lips, and the force of it all pulls me against her roughly, my face breaths from hers.

My heart is pounding. I can just imagine Umbridge sneaking up on Potter. I spin Granger's slim body around, pulling her back against me again. This time my arm slithers around her waist. Her breath against my hand.

Umbridge reaches for the back of Potter's head.

And it feels like I'm getting everything I've ever wanted. There is a headmistress who truly respects me. Potter is about to get what he deserves. And she's in my arms.

She tries to kick, and I pull her back against me, my arm wrapping further around her stomach and I can't stop my fingers as they stretch, trying to touch more of her. She's so soft against me. She's shaking, and I sigh against her hair, breathing in and trying to place the most delicious aroma. It's her shampoo, or her perfume, or *her* and she's pressed tight against me. I can feel her backside against my groin, her hipbones under my fingers, and her neck is tilted perfectly so that I could press my mouth under her ear if I wanted.

She's gasping for air against my hand, and I catch myself turning my face into hers, about to press against her temple, when Potter yelps at Umbridge's hand pulling his hair back, taking him out of the fireplace.

This is too dangerous. My pounding blood distracts me. I can feel her ribs expanding against mine, and I'm sucking in mouthfuls of her scent, feeling her hair tickle my neck.

I want to press her against the wall again. Let her feel me.

I focus on bricks. Building a sloppy wall. I blink, and when Potter's wand flies through the air, I shove her away from me, giving her to Bulstrode to watch over.

I feel some kind of victory, even as Umbridge refuses my assistance in the forest. The sensation of success doesn't fade even as the Gryffindors overpower us and as we hear about the battle at the Ministry. It isn't until later that night when the Aurors come for Father that I finally wonder what I think I won.

~*~

Tuesday, November 9, 1999

She looks lighter. Maybe I'm imagining it, but in comparison to the weight I've been trudging along with, she seems like she floats.

She meets my eyes in the lifts on Tuesday, and looks away. Like I don't exist.

She's in line in front of me at the café on Wednesday, and she pretends not to notice.

On Thursday, she's carrying a stack of paperwork through the Atrium on her way home, and several papers flutter away from her. Before she can grab her wand to gather them, I sweep them up and place them on top. She keeps her face turned away from me as she mutters her thanks and continues through the fireplace without another word.

She passes me in the Atrium again on Friday and I see her take in the circles under my eyes and my unwashed hair, and before I feel the flush of embarrassment, she turns away.

On Saturday I decide to focus on something else. I meet with a property manager after Quidditch, and he shows me several locations that could be magically expanded and hidden. He recognizes me as Lucius Malfoy's son, and doesn't ask what my price range is.

When I get home, I stop by Mother's library. She's reading a letter. She folds it away when she sees me.

"What's that?" I nod to the letter.

Mother takes a breath and says, "It's Cornerstone Books. Something I pre-ordered is ready." She levels her eyes on me, and I shuffle my feet. "Do you have any business in Diagon Alley tomorrow?"

"No," I snap. "Nor will I."

She nods slowly. "Then maybe I should pick it up?"

She's watched me this week. Watched me not bathe, not sleep, not eat. She's said nothing, still smarting from our argument.

"Do they not have a delivery service at Cornerstone?" I say. Her lips twist. "I think it would be best if our relationship with Cornerstone Books remained perfectly professional."

She raises a brow at me. "As you wish."

I turn on my heel and head upstairs. I uncork a Dreamless Sleep potion and fall onto my bed, fully clothed.

~*~

Monday, November 15, 1999

Robards gives me a case first thing Monday and it's the perfect distraction.

He checks in with me at noon and I let him know the progress is slow.

“I can see if Mathilda can spare Granger?” he says, and my eyes snap up to him. “The two of you worked so well together on the other—“

“No, that’s fine,” I cut him off, shoving my hair away from my face. “I have it under control here. Probably done tomorrow.”

A tight smile. He returns it.

“If you’re sure…”

“Positive,” I say.

The next morning, Granger knocks on the conference room door.

I had forgotten about her for a total of forty-three minutes. It was calming and hollow.

We’re staring at each other, and I realize I have a quill tucked between my teeth like an idiot.

“Robards summoned me,” she explains.

“I told him I had it under control.” This is a losing battle.

“Well, I’m here now.”

She moves into the room, places her things down, and with a slow effort, comes to stand near me. I move aside so she doesn’t have to be in my personal space. I clear my throat.

“We’ve made several arrests in Diagon Alley over the past month,” I begin, “and while the crimes are different, four of the apprehended wizards have carried runes on them.”

I launch into the long story, the logistics, the suspects, the leads. I hand her a pile of paperwork to sift through, a stack of scratch paper. She’s silent, and I don’t dare look up at her.

I go back to the family history of the third wizard as she catches up. After half an hour she stands, back cracking, and pulls her wand.

I recover from my momentary fear for my life as she starts posting the reports and pictures on the conference room wall.

The image I’m examining gets pulled from my hands.

“What are you doing?”

“Trust me. It’s very helpful.”

She goes to the wall and begins a kind of timeline maybe? We spend the next few hours in silence, the timeline growing, hypotheses added.

But I can’t concentrate with her in here. Her scent…

I glance up at her and she's pulling her lip between her teeth, thinking hard. I have to look away.

An hour later I've given up. I cast *Oculus Dolus* and just spend some time watching her read, watching her push her hair out of her face, watching her lips move silently over the words. All while my eyes appear downcast on my reading.

What does she want? An apology?

No. An explanation.

Why is your blood on my living room walls?

Father told her? What did Father know about that mission? What truths did he twist to make her distrust me?

I release the eye focus charm.

"It was a mission. From the Dark Lord."

I watch her take a deep breath and then look up at me. "What kind of mission?"

I consider telling her everything. Telling her about the portkey, the abandoned mill in Cokeworth. The way I approached the Dark Lord in his chair after dinner, asking to let me learn from Yaxley.

But that's not her question.

"The worst kind." I keep my eyes on her, begging her to ask.

"So, after finding an empty house… you decided to do some redecorating?" Her tone is light, but accusatory. Almost like an old joke between friends.

"That was Yaxley's design."

"But your blood?"

"Why spill his own?" I grin, grim and small.

I want to tell her. Tell her that I had a plan, that I was prepared to…

But then where would we be? What would she ask me next? And would I answer her?

I let her brain work, and I look down at my paperwork.

Maybe this was the worst of it. Just get through this confession, and we'd go back to the way we were, with books and coffee and Saturday visits.

Doubtful.

I ask, "What other *secrets* did my father spill to you." I wait for her.

“Your father didn’t tell me anything about that.”

It’s like a lightning shock through me. I look up at her and she’s considering me.

She continues, “You told me not to go home. So, of course, I went.”

I blink at her. So it’s a general distrust of me. That’s what father’s given her. If I told her to turn left, she’d check over her right shoulder first.

A knock at the door and Potter steps in.

“Hey, Malfoy.” He sees Granger and he freezes. “Oh, uh… You’re helping again?”

“Robards sent for me,” she says, like she has to defend her decision to be in this room.

“Er, well. There’s been another message intercepted.”

He waves a piece of paper in his hand, and I’m so grateful for a lead on this case so that hopefully she can be out of this room tomorrow. She tears the message from Potter’s fingers, and I’m reading it over her shoulder before I realize that the scent of her is stronger this way.

“Well, this fits with the Northwest Germanic, but this over here fits the Scandinavian,” she mumbles.

“We’d ruled out the Scandinavian. It must be the Germanic.”

“But now that we have this, we can’t rule out Scandinavian.”

I take the message from her as she skips over to her notes.

“Oh,” Potter says. “You… made a Wall.”

I look up and he’s examining the far wall.

“Does she do that a lot?” I ask.

Potter smiles at me, like there’s a joke I’ll get when I’m older. “It’s a recent thing.” He shifts and turns back to me. “Are you two pausing for lunch?”

Lunch. Fuck.

It’s ten past noon. Katya is probably pacing the street where the telephone booth sits, waiting for me to appear.

I should clean up, stuff paperwork away, and pack up my briefcase. I mark our place by making notes about the recent message.

“Malfoy? Are you hungry?”

Potter, ever the gentleman.

“Thank you, but, no. I have a prior engagement.”

“I’ll see you after lunch,” she says, voice small.

I nod, and continue packing my bag, cleaning the conference room in case someone needs it at lunch. I grab my coat from the rack, tuck it under my arm, and push out the conference room door to find Katya smiling brightly, and Granger staring at me.

My blood stops.

“Draco! Look who I finally got to meet!”

Katya is beaming, and Granger looks a little grey.

She can see, can’t she? How similar they are. How they’re a mirror image of each other. Granger’s skin creamier, and Katya’s legs longer, but the same.

“Wonderful.” My voice cracks. “Granger, this is Katya.”

“I’ve been gushing. I’m sorry. I just can’t believe I ran into her!” Katya grins.

Gushing. Was thirty seconds long enough to spill all my secrets?

Granger is dismissing herself, and suddenly Katya is inviting her to lunch with us.

I’ll throw myself in front of a Muggle automobile on the way.

“Oh, that’s very kind, but I already have lunch plans,” Granger deflects. “Thank you, Katya.”

Katya continues to smile and plan and get to know her, and my eyes can’t take in both of them anymore. I feel like a potion that’s about to bubble over.

There’s a muscle in my neck that seizes and I roll my head, cracking the bones.

“I’ll see you after lunch, Granger.” I ignore the way her eyes follow my hand on Katya’s back, guiding her away.

“So wonderful to meet you, Hermione!”

First name familiarity in under two minutes, a feat I’ve been working on for almost ten years.

On the way to lunch, I have to hear about Granger’s Gringotts project and her house elf activism and her beautifully clear skin and do I happen to know what she uses it in her hair because the curls are so *full*.

“Why would I know what she uses for shampoo?” I finally snap.

Katya is quiet for a moment.

I crack my neck again. “I’m sorry I was late. I didn’t know you would sneak into the Ministry to find me.”

She laughs and says, “I didn’t sneak in. I got a Guest Pass.” She’s quiet as we turn the corner to the lunch spot, then, “Does she work on your floor?”

“No. We were working on a project together.”

The storefront of the café is like a beacon, and I walk faster, hoping for silence.

“Do you often work on projects together?”

“Just recently.”

She’s finally quiet again, and I pull the door handle for her, looking down at her face. She’s watching me.

She knows.

I take a deep breath. We walk to a corner table.

It’s fine if she knows. We have an agreement. I don’t have to lie to her.

As we sit, I remember that there are no cameras. Katya was the one to arrange this meeting. I try to relax and say, “Why did you ask to meet today? Is there something wrong?”

“Yes and no.”

I drag my eyes off the menu, and blink at her. “Oh?”

“Well,” she says, and swallows. “Our last publicity stunt.” The kiss. The second one in the alley. “Andrei wasn’t as unbothered by it as he thought he’d be.”

“Oh,” I say. My forehead wrinkles. “I… er, I can talk to him? I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” She smiles, a blush pulling her cheeks. “He…” She laughs. “He wants to elope.”

I stare at her. I smile. “Worked like a charm?”

She swats my arm. “I didn’t intend to make him jealous!” She brushes her hair back. “But he wants to make it official. We’re going to save for a few months, and then get married. And deal with my father later.”

I smile, but it’s missing something.

“That’s wonderful. I’m happy for you.” I fold my hands. “But I assume you and I need to end this?”

She nods. “I’m afraid so. We don’t need to make it a public thing if you don’t want to. We can just… fade.”

“That’s fine. We can't stretch this on any longer anyway. I think my father knows that this is a sham.”

The waitress fills our glasses. I gulp at the water.

"Is everything alright? Is he giving you obstacles?"

"Always," I say, relief flowing through my muscles at the idea of actually talking to someone about all this. "But he and I have an arrangement. I'm opening on January 1st."

I continue. I tell her about my meetings with Mockridge and my upcoming one with Ogden. I tell her about the office space, feeling prouder and more excited than I have in months. She listens. She sips her tea and asks questions and perhaps I should stop and ask her more about herself, but then she's rolling her eyes about Blaise taking lead in Marketing and asking if I truly think he's the right quality for Malfoy Consulting.

"He's quite good, I assure you. An absolute cad, but the youngest representative of wizard-based wineries in Sicily in history." I peel apart my muffin.

"And do you have any charitable work?" she asks.

"Once we get on our feet, I plan on taking one *pro bono* case per quarter."

She lifts a brow at me. "Hm." She sips her tea.

"What?"

"Well," she begins, looking over my shoulder out the window, "I would assume that one of your biggest obstacles starting out would be public opinion." She checks in with me. "And one of the best ways to show off your company is through charitable work and representation for underprivileged species." She tilts her head to the side. "You could have an entire *branch* for *pro bono* work. For representation of all the people and species that would never before have been associated with the name Malfoy."

I blink at her. A branch is manpower. And salary. And office space. And benefits. And consistent work - consistent *good* work.

I'm staring into my teacup, calculating, when Katya says, "And speaking as someone who's had experience with charitable work, I can tell you that with the right person at the helm, the expenses can all be fundraised."

I look up at her. I smirk. "Katya, if you wanted a job, you could have just asked."

"Oh, no, not me." She laughs. "I'll be quite busy with my own work. But you'll need someone with a reputation. Someone who… when she walks into a room, people will want to throw money at her just to be close to her." She sips her tea and I can hear the words before they come out of her mouth. "Why is Hermione Granger working an analyst job at the Ministry?"

I swallow and look away from her. "She's taking the slow path to Minister, I believe. But she... wouldn't be a good fit for Malfoy Consulting."

"Why not? I thought you were friends now."

I stare at the table and imagine telling Father that I did exactly as he asked, but that a portion of that precious inheritance is going toward Hermione Granger, and keeping her by my side. I almost laugh.

Then I remember her tears, and the way her hair flew behind her as she ran from the Manor. The look in her eyes when she asked about the blood she'd found in her house.

"To an extent," I respond. "But she'd never want to work for me."

"With you."

I look up. Katya is playing with the handle on her teacup. She says, "She'd work *with* you. With autonomy."

I watch her fingers move as I think of the way we work to solve rune cases and dragon egg mysteries and --

"It's a bright idea, Katya, but impossible, I'm afraid."

I pour a bit more tea into my cup. I stir in the honey. I watch the steam.

"Because of your father," she says, with a finality. Like she's known all along.

I breathe deep, and bring my gaze back to her, back to her smart eyes.

"What kind of arrangement do you have with him, Draco?" she asks.

I swallow and press my lips together. "To stay away from her."

She nods.

"That must be very difficult. Especially with the way she looks at you."

My eyes snap to her, and an eager warmth swims into my veins.

~*~

Thursday, November 18, 1999

I don’t think I like American accents.

Maybe it’s more specific than that.

I don’t like the letter “R.”

“But the car was parked, like, across the street, so we like, carried our dresses all the way there!”

I wonder if my eye is twitching like my brain is.

Noelle pulls the straw of her drink between her lips and slurps happily. We're about done for the evening, I think. I've already set up the lunch with her father. She's already fond of me. And we're flirting just enough to keep things casual and uncomplicated.

Yes, it's time for Noelle to go home. And stop talking.

"It was so funny! Like, he fell over! Like, in the street!"

I wonder what quiet sounds like. It's been so long since I've, like, heard it.

"Do you want another drink?" I say. "Or, wait, you said you needed to be up early tomorrow to see your grandfather, yes?"

"Mm-hmm. He's an early-riser so I basically—"

"That's too bad. I'll get your coat."

I guide us toward the door, stopping to help her slip on her coat, and just before her arm can slide in, a buffoon bumps her. I really don't have the energy to defend Noelle Ogden's honor tonight, so I'm hoping it's a pure accident.

"Sorry, love!" Aiden O'Connor. And Granger stands next to him. When did she appear?

He's talking about some retirement party when I finally realize that his arm disappears behind her back, holding her close to him.

She's blushing.

I look away from her.

"O'Connor, Granger, this is Noelle."

Noelle shakes O'Connor's hand, and starts dancing in place when Granger introduces herself. Another member of Granger's fan club.

My head hurts.

"Oh, Draco we have to stay now!" Noelle grabs me and I almost shake her off.

The girls and some friends of O'Connor's head toward a long open table. O'Connor follows me to the bar to grab a round of drinks for all his friends, and as he mumbles out loud that he should have asked Granger what she wanted, I turn to the bartender and order her a Butterbeer.

I flip some coins onto the bar, and he's still rummaging for his sickles.

"I got it." Levitating the order of drinks over to our table, I prepare for what looks to be an awful evening.

Granger and Noelle are chatting, which is not my favorite sight in the world.

Noelle asks them questions. Noelle giggles. Noelle sounds like an idiot. And Granger looks over to me, like I've gone soft in the head. I look away from her.

Someone touches my shoulder, and before I can turn and hex them, I hear a familiar voice.

“I’d recognize the back of your head anywhere, mate.”

Marcus. I laugh. “What are you doing here, you bastard?!” I jump up and his arms are around me, clapping me on the back and laughing in my ear. I haven't seen him in maybe three years, before he went off on his potions apprenticeship. He finally got his teeth done right.

"Looking for a good time!" He chuckles. "Not that you'd know where to find one of those."

I shove at his shoulder, feeling thirteen again. "How long are you in town for?"

"Another week, then it's back to Brazil. I've been made Potions Master." He beams, his cocky smirk so familiar, it's possible I see it in the mirror every morning.

"Congratulations. We'll need to drink to that!"

Merlin, I forgot what it feels like to have a friend that isn't Harry Potter.

“Marcus, you remember Noelle Ogden?”

Noelle jumps up and hugs him. Over her shoulder, he lifts a brow at me, an approval of sorts, like I've snagged the prettiest witch at the ball. I don't correct him.

But then Marcus's eyes slide over to Granger, and in a moment the phrase "prettiest witch at the ball" twists around my ribs.

"Hermione Granger," he oozes, and I see a blue dress spinning high around her calves, showing her legs. “Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes.”

"Hello, Flint." She stares at him carefully.

They exchange pleasantries. Noelle sips her drink until it's ice. Marcus asks me about Greg Goyle, and I confess I haven't seen him. I watch Granger out of the corner of my eye, and I see her turn to O'Connor. He says something that makes her laugh. She almost spits out her drink. She turns to look back at Marcus and me, and I look away, back to Noelle as she continues whatever story she's blabbering. I smirk at Marcus, but he's already watching me, eyes flickering over to Granger and back.

I refocus on Noelle.

Marcus starts to dominate the conversation, like he always does. He's telling Noelle a particularly crass story about Millicent Bulstrode and I burst out laughing before he hits the punchline, remembering the look on her face when her fingers turned purple. When he finishes and Noelle cackles, I look up at him and he's looking over my shoulder again.

The ice in Noelle's drink rattles.

"Let's get another round, yeah?" Marcus sets his empty glass down, and nods towards me. I'm only halfway finished with my firewhisky, so I down the rest, and follow him.

I see Noelle turn towards Granger as we leave.

"So, what in Merlin's name are you doing here with Granger?" Marcus smiles.

"I'm not with her." I shove my hair away from my face, the firewhisky burning my throat still. "Noelle and I ran into them. We all work together at the Ministry. And it turns out Noelle is a bit of a Granger fan." I nod back at our table, where Noelle is laughing and talking while Granger listens.

"I think I'm a bit of a fan, too," Marcus hums. My eyes snap back to him.

I recognize the look in his eyes, gliding over her face and dripping down lower. I saw it on him five years ago as he chatted with a few Bulgarians about Granger putting out for Krum. She'd just turned fifteen. I realize Marcus was the same age I am now.

I feel like there are razor blades in my throat as I swallow, and look back to Noelle, silly smile on her face. Maybe Marcus, Noelle, and I can move to a different table.

"How are the women down in Brazil?" I ask, and when I tear my eyes from Granger, he's already looking at me. "Anyone down there catching your interest?"

He shakes away a thought, then grins. "A few. As always." He flags the bartender. "I hear you've snagged yourself Katya Viktor." He smirks at me.

"We're keeping it casual," I say, trying for facetious. He laughs.

"Excellent. Then we can get you laid tonight!" Marcus ruffles my hair, fingers rougher than they need to be. He laughs and slaps me on the back.

After the bartender brings our drinks over, Marcus insists on paying. We levitate all the drinks over and he reminds me of the time we forced Crabbe and Goyle to levitate our pumpkin juice to us every day for a month. I laugh and almost slosh a Butterbeer down O'Connor's front.

Marcus sits across from Granger, and I watch her eyes take in the Butterbeer sliding into her hands.

“Do you not drink, Granger?” Marcus teases. I look to her as she decides what to do with him.

“No, I do. Just slowly.” She takes the glass and lifts a brow at him.

I sip my firewhisky.

“I bet you’re taking points from us all in your head," Marcus says. “’Ten points from Slytherin for having more than one drink per hour. Ten points from – whatever-the-fuck house you were in at Ilvermorny – for giggling out of turn.’”

I look for a smaller table, away from her. There's nothing available. And I don't think getting Marcus to leave her side would be easy.

“Were you a goody-goody, Hermione?” Noelle joins. I roll my eyes.

“Oh, she was the worst! Even before she was a prefect she was walking around like Head Girl,” Marcus whines. “Tell me, Granger, did you ever break the rules, even once?”

I look up at her and she's focused in on him, like an Arithmancy problem she's anxious to solve.

“I broke the rules loads of times,” she says. “But unlike you, I never got caught.”

She drinks from her glass. And Marcus smiles. I drink half my glass.

It goes on like this. Noelle giggles. Marcus starts a story or a memory from Hogwarts and then turns to Granger, asking her for her version of events. She turns a stony face on him with clipped sentences. I drink.

Granger turns back to O'Connor. Marcus calls her name. I drink.

Granger frowns at him. Marcus smiles at her. Noelle giggles and slurps. I drain my glass.

"I have to pee," Noelle announces. Marcus and I stand as she leaves the table. Maybe we can find somewhere else to talk, away from the rest of them.

"Do you play much Quidditch?" I say.

"Haven't gotten a chance to." He sips. "But you've been playing with Potter, I hear." He smirks. "Traitor."

I smile. "It's been... challenging," I lie. "He's shit at captaining a team," I lie again. I watch the pride swell in Marcus's chest.

We chat for a few minutes more but I keep seeing his eyes slide past me, looking at something by the bar. His lips tug.

Marcus grabs my arm.

"Oi! Speaking of Quidditch, you remember that time we scared Potter off the field?"

"Yes. And I remember Potter toppling us with a patronus that day."

"No! Did he really? Granger!" He turns to her stool and pouts when it's empty. He faces me again. "Oh, there she is."

My eyes scan the room, just catching curls as they exit the side door.

Curious.

O’Connor is laughing at the bar. Did she ditch him? Her bag is gone as well.

“She wasn’t looking too well a second ago,” Marcus says, and I hear his voice over my shoulder. “Hope she’s not trying to Apparate.”

“I…er, I’m sure she’s not.” I can’t take my eyes off the door she slipped through. “Excuse me, I’m going to run to the loo.”

Marcus says nothing as I move through the crowd, away from him. She only had two Butterbeers. Unless she’d been drinking at the party beforehand. Why would she slip out?

I press open the door, breeze hitting my neck and sound pouring loud into the alley. She’s to the left, practically in trash. Boxes and crates around her, barely standing, holding onto the wall for support.

“Granger?”

Her head swivels to me.

“Malfoy.” Her tongue is thick. I see the wand in her hand and I let the door close behind me, moving to her.

“What are you doing out here?” she says, words sloshing.

“About to ask you the same question. I hope you’re not trying to Apparate, Granger. You don’t look like you’re in any state.”

A breeze in the alley brings the scent of her towards me.

“Why are you out here?” She blinks with heavy lids. Her pupils are unfocused. She's completely hammered.

“Just how many did you have at the retirement party?” I can't help the scorn in my voice, wondering where O'Connor is, wanting to smack him for letting her get into this state.

She takes large gulps of air. “How did you know I’d come out here? What do you want from me!” Her voice echoes around the stone walls, bouncing around the crates.

Her face is tight, almost afraid. I wonder for a moment if she's even talking to *me*. If she can hear me. Maybe this is an herb...

“What’s wrong with you?” I ask. She mumbles something and holds up her hand before I can move closer to her. Her palm is cut, a thick bead of red slithering down her wrist. "You're bleeding."

I grab her wrist, pulling it to me. I'll have to heal it. Maybe *Tergeo* and then I can wrap my handkerchief --

A gasp. Her hand drops her wand and grabs for my throat. She rips her wrist from my grasp and pulls at my collar. She'll choke me. I step back, ready for an attack. Ready for an assault.

Her body flies into me, pressing against me, and dragging a hand through my hair and I stumble further, righting us and preparing to shove her back if she squeezes my throat. I suck in air, feeling my heart pounding.

My hands steady her hips, muscles ready to fight, and she brings her face to my neck, standing on her toes.

"Draco..." A whisper against my skin. Her fingers curl in my hair.

I'm taut. I'm still. Waiting for the joke. Waiting for the attack.

A soft touch on my neck. A moan. And her lips open, sucking.

My lungs won't operate. My hands are frozen, gripping her hips. She gasps against my neck and kisses my jaw, her tongue pressing against me.

A shiver from my stomach outwards, and the current runs to the tips of my fingers. I squeeze. She moans.

Her chest pressed against me, gasping for air, pushing her breasts into me. My hand slides around to pull her hips tight to me, and my other whispers up her spine, under her hair, her curls tickling my knuckles. My fingertips find her neck, and she groans into my skin, sucking my neck like she's starved.

This isn't right. She's not...

Her hips move, pushing forward.

My eyes roll back in my head. "Granger, what are you doing?”

My arms are shaking, trying to keep from pushing, from moving too fast for her. I feel her lips skim my jaw, and I wonder how close she'll get. I turn towards her, impatient.

She shoves me, pushing me off balance, and we both stumble. She hits her head against the bricks.

“What did you do to me?” she demands.

Quite the opposite, Granger. I refocus on her, on her question. "What?" My voice is thin, panting.

“Why are you doing this?” Her lip trembles. I feel my arousal fade.

"Granger?"

She's scared. I'm looking for clues. Her skin is red and overheated, her mouth is open and panting. She still looks like she wants me. And I feel acid in my throat that she's terrified of it. Ashamed.

Especially with the way she looks at you. Katya had said...

She starts to fall over. I jump to catch her, both hands on her waist. She gasps.

She's drunk. She's drunk and doesn't know what she's doing anymore.

I take in her dilated eyes, and her gasping lips. Her head drops to the side, like it's too heavy for her neck.

This wasn't drunk.

“What’s happened to you?” My voice is loud. I lift her head, and her throat clicks on the air.

She groans and the sound drifts through my ears, down my chest and twists to my cock. Her hand comes up to press over mine, holding my palm against her face. She grabs my shirt with her other fingers, twists her head into my hand, and begins sucking on me, right over my veins. Her tongue laps and disappears.

"Oh, god, Draco."

She looks up at my face, her eyes glazed over in lust.

Especially with the way she looks at you.

Would she let me? I could press against her in this quiet alley, push my knee between her thighs, slip my fingers up her skirt. I could lift her, step into her hips, drag her legs around my waist. I could press my lips to her neck, tasting her, drifting to her mouth.

Would she let me?

My hand is still on her waist. I'm dizzy with want. I press my hand beside her head, her eyes staring up at me as she sucks on my wrist.

She's in my arms finally, kissing my skin and clutching me, and begging me.

"Granger..." I breathe against her face. My fingers curl against the bricks.

"Stop! Don't do this!" She releases me and pushes.

I jump back, panting. So close.

I hold my hands up, fingers shaking, hoping she doesn't look past my waist where my cock is straining.

“Why did you follow me out here?”

“I saw you exit.”

She stares at me, confused.

“What did you give me?” she hisses.

"Give you?" I narrow my eyes at her. She can finally make coherent sentences but her words make no sense.

"What did you put in my drink, Malfoy?!"

I frown at her. Put in her drink. I open my mouth to say "nothing," to ask her to clarify.

But her behavior. Falling over. Touching me. Kissing me. It was all wrong.

Behavior modification. Lust potion.

Potion.

Marcus. I look to the door I came through. Why would he...

"What is it? How do I stop it?" Her voice brings me back. I look at her just as she starts to fall over again. I move to her. "DON'T TOUCH ME!"

I freeze. I wait for her to right herself.

"Why did you poison me? What do you *want?"* she asks.

I poisoned her. I poisoned her and came out here to... That's what she thinks. And I almost did. Drunk or not, I almost did.

My stomach tenses. I'm going to be sick.

How could I ever think that she would let me?

I'm about to excuse myself, tell her I'll go get O'Connor when the door opens again and there he is.

"There you guys are!" She closes her eyes. "We're talking about heading to the pub down the street. What do you think?"

I wait. I wait for her to ask him to call the authorities. I wait for her to tell him that I tried to be with her when she clearly had been drugged.

It was so clear now. Slurred speech. Falling over. Stumbling towards me. And I hadn't cared.

"What's going on?" O'Connor prompts us.

Her wand is on the ground between us as well. A snapshot of this moment is all the D.M.L.E. would need. *Former Death Eater Assaults Golden Girl.*

I hear her speak. "I… I had one too many." I look up. She's looking at me. "Draco caught me trying to Apparate home. And I'm in no state." She laughs a hollow sound.

I frown at her. What is she afraid of? Tell him the truth.

“Granger, you’re such a lightweight!” O'Connor steps closer to her. She moves her hair back, and I'm disgusted by how debauched she looks, lips red and hair falling and tangling. O'Connor says, “You’re cut?”

He reaches for her hand. I jolt, too late to keep him from touching her, from starting this whole thing again.

O'Connor's fingers wrap around her wrist. And the air is still. She doesn't move. She looks up at me, a new wave of anger rolling from her.

"I fell."

Why is it only me?

Marcus did this. His fingers in my hair at the bar, rough and unnatural, pulling hairs.

She's glaring at me still. O'Connor is guiding her away, laughing about her drunkenness. Her wand is on the ground still. She's in such a hurry to get away from me.

“Granger.”

They turn. She takes it. O'Connor laughs.

The oaf wraps his arm around her and guides her to the Apparition point, and I wait until they're gone, itching to move. I hold onto the hate in her eyes. I haven’t seen it in a while.

I yank open the side door to the pub, and my eyes scan until I find him. People are moving out of my way. Noelle is giggling next to him and I ignore her as she greets me.

I want to tear through him. I want to put my fist through his face, feeling the bones crack. But I should make sure –

He looks at me, grins and says, “That was quick.”

I have him thrown against the wall in seconds. “What the fuck is your problem?”

People are scrambling away from me, and I hear Noelle gasp.

He laughs, his fancy new teeth cutting into his lips. “Come on, Draco! Why is it so hard to just enjoy yourself?” He shakes his head, like I’ve declined a smoke. I pull him away from the wall and slam him back into it, listening as his head cracks against the wall. Noelle screams.

“What is it?” I demand. “When does it wear off.”

He winces, and grabs my hands, pulling me off. “Merlin! The fuck, Draco!” He shoves me away. He pulls a vial out of his pocket and I snatch it from him. It has a few drops left. He says, “I made it myself.”

I'll need to take it home. I'll need to deconstruct it and find out what mistakes he made, potions expert or not.

"It should have worked."

I look up and he's examining me.

"Or," he says, "maybe she's just as frigid as we all thought?" He raises a brow. And I slam my fist into it.

He falls against the wall again, and I aim my other fist to break his new teeth. His head smacks back against the bricks and I hear the bartender yelling at us to get out.

"You stay the fuck away from her. I don't want you to even *look* at her ever again."

I turn, dodging several blokes who think they can throw me out. I grab Noelle's arm and pull her with me. Her face is wide and horrified.

"Some things never change, huh, Draco!" He tosses after me. I feel the heat creep up my neck as we exit into the cold air.

~*~

Saturday, April 16, 1994

It was the Firebolt. It had to be.

I had the Snitch. I had it. Then Potter and his fancy broom actually outraced me.

I'm stomping back to the cabins. The entire house of Gryffindor is flooding the field, lifting Potter onto their shoulders.

"What the *fuck,* Malfoy??"

I turn and Marcus is running for me.

"I had it! You know I had it! He outstripped me!" I scream.

"That's dragon dung!" He shoves me and I fall back, righting myself. I'm shocked he actually touched me. "You were *leagues* ahead of him. The only reason he beat you to it is because you were distracted."

"Distracted? I wasn't --"

"I *saw* you! Checking the Gryffindor stands, making sure your *girlfriend* was watching you dive."

"My --? My what?" My eyes are popping out of my head.

He grabs my collar and drags me towards him. "She's not here for you," he hisses. "She's here for Potter."

My blood is pumping. "I -- I have no idea what you're--"

"Get your head on straight, Draco, or I'll write to your Father. Tell him that every time Hermione fucking Granger is in the Quidditch stands, you can't keep your eyes on the Snitch."

He shoves me, and I stumble to the side, just as Severus approaches to talk to the team. I gape after him, breathing hard. Severus brushes past me, not bothering to help me up.

I look over to the crowd of Gryffindors. Wood is crying. Potter is holding up the Cup. And Granger is standing on the edge of the crowd with Weasley, jumping up and down.

I don't stare at her. I look down at my uniform, brush away the grass and dirt. I don't.

She's just always reading a damn book in the stands, doesn't take her eyes off it for anyone.

~*~

Thursday, November 18, 1999 - later

Noelle is screaming at me, but I can't hear her. She wrenches her arm from my grasp and stops in the street.

"What the hell, Draco!"

"Let's get you home," I try, reaching for her. She stands her ground.

"What is wrong with you?! *Brawling?"* She waves her hands about, hair tossing wildly. I don't have time for this. I need to get to my potions laboratory.

Possibly Asphodel.

A variant on Amortentia?

Where is the disorientation from?

Noelle is still yelling.

"--I mean, I hope that wasn't some *macho* display! Marcus and I were just *talking.* And besides, Draco, you have no claim on me!"

"Shut. Up." I hiss. "The world doesn't revolve around you. *You* had nothing to do with this. *You* are not important."

She blinks up at me, jaw dropping. I feel guilt, but then I think of Ashwinder eggs...

She glares. She says something about finding her own way home, and I'm so relieved when she marches away. I Disapparate on the spot, not caring to check if any Muggles are watching.

I pop onto the hill outside the Manor. The wind bites at me and I run through the lane, into the front door. I turn down the stairs towards our potions room. I take Marcus's vial from my pocket. There's three drops left.

I heat the cauldrons, and start the process of breaking it down, taking only two drops and saving the rest. I haven't done this in years. Haven't been in the room since before the war. It used to calm me. Now I'm hurried, and practically knocking beakers to the ground.

I was right.

Diluted Amortentia, with a variant on a warming potion. Causes the drinker to overheat, need to go outside...

Sneezewort for the confusion.

Porcupine quills to encourage the euphoria once in contact with the person whose hair has been added.

I cobble together an antidote. Something to ease the warmth, confusion, and euphoria. I add it to a Love Potion Antidote, boiling and stirring counter-clockwise.

I cork it, run upstairs, and out the door to the Appartion hill past our gate. I pop through to a street I'm not supposed to the know the name of, next to a flat I'm not supposed to know the address for.

I push through the front door, and I'm halfway up the stairs before I realize I have no idea how I'm supposed to do this.

The door opens when I'm three stairs away from the landing, and Potter exits, shrugging on his coat. My foot hovers over the next step, and he freezes when he catches sight of me, hand on the doorknob.

He looks inside, and shuts the door, turning hard eyes on me. He presses his lips together.

I swallow. "How is she?"

No response. He looks me up and down, and for the first time in all my years knowing him, it's clear to me that this is the man who defeated the darkest wizard of our time. Twice.

I take a shaky breath. I pull the vial out of my pocket. "If she continues having symptoms... if she's still dizzy or overheated, she can take this --"

He shoves me.

I'm flying backwards, hands grasping for the railing, knees rolling over my head as my back lands against the stairs, righting myself before I continue down. I'm at the bottom of the stairwell, on my ass. I look to the top of the stairs.

Potter's crackling with magic.

"Do you think," he begins, descending upon me, "I would *ever* let her drink anything you brewed for her again?"

"I didn't brew it." It hurts to breathe.

He stops two steps from me.

"Did you touch her? Place your hands on her?"

The pain in my back could be a cracked rib. I have to pull my neck back to look up at The Boy Who Lived.

"I didn't mean to --" I hear my voice, cracked, and wet. He's blurred above me, and I know I'm about to fucking cry in front of Harry Potter. "I didn't know she was..."

But I can't continue. Because I did know. She was stumbling. And slurring. And when she grabbed for me, I grabbed her back.

I sniff, looking away, breathing into my broken chest.

"She won't talk about it. She just says she was slipped a drugging potion, and tried to throw herself at you," he says. I crane my neck to look up at him, the light in the stairwell a halo behind him. "Did you take advantage of her? Did you--?"

"No," I cough. "Not like that. I didn't... We stopped. She stopped." I wheeze in air. I want to stand. I want to leave. But I don't know how badly I'm injured. And I don't want to find out in front of him.

"You have a love bite on your neck," he says. I stare at him, and bring my hand up to it, and see a bruise on my wrist. "Is that from her?"

"Yes."

I stare at my wrist, like I can see the mark turning purple before my very eyes.

"She's unmarked," he says, voice quiet. "Ginny checked while she helped her get into the shower."

I look up at him, and nod.

Potter pauses, thinking. He leans down and plucks up the vial that clattered to the stairs as I fell. "What is this?"

"It's a mixture. Love Potion Antidote, with something to fight her dizziness, overheating, and confusion."

"She doesn't have any of those symptoms," he says. "She's just crying and vomiting."

That stings. As much as I hate myself now, I'm tempted to never launder this shirt again, so I can keep her smell on it. But she's getting rid of my taste, squeezing it out of her like acid.

I just shake my head. "Okay."

I bite down on my tongue, and start to lift myself up. Potter stands, still two steps up, and watches as I drag myself up to stand.

I can't meet his eyes.

"Broken rib?" he says. His voice is softer.

"Maybe." I start to turn. He pulls his wand.

A diagnostic spell. The two of us stare at the cracked rib. He gestures for me to turn around, and casts a *Brackium Emendo*. My bones pop. I grind my teeth to keep from yelling out.

"Thanks."

I start for the door.

"The two of you..." he starts. I stop. "You're toxic." It's less accusatory. It's sad.

I look back at him, a grim smile.

"You have no idea, Potter."

I leave, sore around the middle, and every place I hit on the way down.

~*~

Friday, November 19, 1999

It's 4AM when I make it back to the front gate of the Manor. I slink up the stairs to my room, and head for my bathroom. The lights bright against the walls, and I turn to find my mirror.

A large bruise against my jugular. Small kisses along my jaw. And a thick mark against my wrist. Split skin from where my knuckle connected with Marcus's face. I pull my wand, to heal them or hide them. And I see red streaked and dried through the hair at my temple. I turn my head to look at it in the mirror.

Her blood, from her hand. The same hand that wound into my hair with strong fingers.

Oh, god, Draco.

I close my eyes. It's ridiculous really, to think that she'd want to embrace me like that. That I let that happen. I start to laugh. I laugh until my sore back hurts. I slip off my shirt and do exactly what I thought I might. I tuck it away in my closet drawers next to a box of newspaper clippings.

I bathe and get ready for the day, heading in at 6AM. I see the bruises on my way out, and the shame they give me is a bit of a comfort. A reminder that it happened.

It’s my fault that it happened at all. If I had been more careful around Marcus. If I’d steered him away from her sooner. If I’d concentrated more while searching for the Snitch.

And maybe it will be good for my image to have hickeys on my neck. I laugh an exhausted chuckle.

I take my work into the conference room.

Hours later, the door opens. And there she is. She looks tired. And pale. She shuts the door behind her.

Is she insane? The potion is still in her system.

She stands at the door, holding her head up high.

“I’m sorry I accused you of drugging me last night,” she says. I set down my papers, and look down at the desk. “I had… I had just figured out what was happening when you stepped outside. I thank you for coming out to check on me, but I know now that your intention was not to follow me out to… I shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions. I was scared.”

I nod. I reach for the vial containing one last drop of Marcus's potion that I brought in, intending to do Merlin-knows-what with. I toss it to her, afraid to get within reaching distance.

She catches it, miraculously, and I almost laugh.

“Ashwinder egg, asphodel, and several other things,” I say, listing off the research I'd done. “Its effects should be a slow heating process, followed by dizziness and disorientation, and eventually lust when touched by the person whose hair has been added to the potion. It was Flint.”

She glances back at me, like she already knew this. “And he used your hair, and not his own?”

I have to look away from her.

“Marcus has very interesting ways of amusing himself" is all I say. My eyes are on my paperwork again.

"Thank you for coming outside to check on me," she says. "And thank you for not… taking advantage of the situation.”

A tight breath escapes me, like a laugh. My lips twist.

“I must have a different definition of ‘taking advantage of the situation.’”

“It could have been a lot worse last night," she says.

I hear her leave. I nod at the empty room.

Yes, it could have been worse... if she hadn't come to her senses both times we came into contact.

I would have pressed up against her, pinned her between myself and the wall. I would have turned her face towards me with the hand already on her cheek, claimed her lips, and pushed my hips into her. I would have tasted her, twisting my tongue around hers and opened her blouse, button by button until I could kiss my way down her chest. I would have dipped my fingers beneath her knickers, and forced her to ride my hand as I palmed at her chest, mouth silencing her groans. When her climax ripped from her lips I would have let it bounce around the alley, against the dirty crates and empty boxes, before I tore her knickers off and unbuttoned my trousers, forgetting how much I wanted to lay her down for our first time, looking down on her.

I would have lifted her, wrapping her around me as I sank into her, trapping her body against the bricks and while she moaned from the potion, I would have touched her just before I came inside of her, playing with her clit until she screamed, clenching me, holding onto me, and gasping for me all because of a case of bad timing and Ashwinder eggs.

Potter comes by the conference room at lunch. I stare at him, waiting. He brings over a cup of tea, and sets it down on my desk before heading out. I shake my head at him.

"I heard a rumor once that the Sorting Hat almost put you in Slytherin, Potter."

He turns and nods.

I take a sip. Honey.

"You wouldn't have lasted a day."

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your patience! This chapter dedicated to the lovely Lilly_Anne. ;)

Some fun news: I've been nominated for a boatload of awards at the Beyond the Book FanFiction Nook group on Facebook! Including Favorite Author and 2 for All the Wrong Things. Check this link to vote: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf9h-zaH8sTTErFV0GU_R1bCLNUDW-HszRzcuHJ7Ikk3lCZbA/viewform

Tuesday, May 6, 1997

Perhaps this is right.

Perhaps this is how it always should have gone. With Potter standing over me.

I always assumed the body tried to save itself, but my heart pumps my blood faster, like it doesn't know...

How can the body not know?

The blood is in my throat now, like liquid iron. I cough.

Myrtle. She's screaming. I don't know what for. This is how it's supposed to be. No one will come running for me, Myrtle.

Potter kneels beside me. Everywhere is so wet.

Maybe this is right. Maybe it should be Potter's face - the last thing I see. A handshake he wouldn't take, his arm knocking my hand away from the Snitch, the way she hugs him and holds him close...

It's going to be easier this way. I didn't fail the Dark Lord. Potter killed me. Possibly beginning the war. My mother... she will kill him for this. She'll raze the castle. But Mother

will be safe, because I didn't fail.

And I didn't succeed either. I won't be remembered as the boy who killed Albus Dumbledore. That's not how she'll remember me. With luck, she'll remember me as Potter's biggest mistake. I almost smile.

The ceiling is spotting. Perhaps it's caving in? There's a gurgling that I recognize as my lungs, bubbling through my blood.

Potter is still here. And though I wish for someone else, someone with wide eyes and soft skin, who might even know how to fix this. She'd try a few spells. Perhaps she'd cry over me. And I'd take her hand -

Black. It's so dark in here.

And then Severus. I almost laugh, because that is surely *not* who I wished for.

A song from somewhere. I wonder if she sings.

~*~

Saturday, November 20, 1999

Draco,

I will be unable to keep our lunch date this afternoon. I wish you success with Malfoy Consulting Group, but I feel it is not the right fit for me or for my family.

Tiberius Ogden

~*~

Monday, November 22, 1999

I knock on Robards door.

"Mr. Malfoy! Come in!"

If only everyone could be as jolly as Robards. The world would be a brighter place.

"Morning, sir. Can I have a moment?"

"Of course, of course." He pushes aside his tea and closes a file. "What's on your mind?"

"I... uh... I wanted to inform you that Granger and I had a falling out." I swallow. His eyebrows jump. "Not that we were close to begin with." I smile.

"Oh, I see." He blinks. He doesn't see.

"So, I think it would be best for everyone involved if we could avoid working on assignments together. The less contact, the better," I say.

Robards nods. "Alright. Yes, that's fine." He looks down at his desk. "Is there anything I can do? Do you need any outside problem-solving?"

"No," I say. "It's entirely a personal dispute." The whisper of *Draco* brushes across my ear. "I made some mistakes, some poor choices, and I think it's best for Miss Granger if I keep my distance."

Robards sighs. He nods in agreement.

~*~

Tuesday, November 23, 1999

Mr. Draco Malfoy,

Your request to visit prisoner number LM537 on December 1, 1999, has been declined. Pursuant to M.L.C. 8192, Section 4a, a prisoner can decline a visitation request for any reason.

If you represent the legal counsel for prisoner number LM537, please contact the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Administration Services.

Sincerely,

Ulysses Olyphant

Azkaban Visitation Coordinator

I blink at the letter. This is a mistake. I pull a new sheet of parchment, and address a second request, this one for December 2nd.

~*~

Wednesday, November 24, 1999

"I spoke with Siobhan Selwyn last night." Mother's voice stops me on my way out to work.

I stare at her. "Yes?"

Her eyes leave the newspaper and turn to me. "She and her sister would be interested in some business advice. They'll be starting a small boutique in Diagon Alley early next year. You should sit down with them."

"That's not really the clientele Malfoy Consulting will be after," I say.

"Oh?" She raises a brow at me. "Boutiques are too small-minded for you?"

"Siobhan's husband is in Azkaban, Mother."

She levels a stare at me. "So is mine."

I open my mouth. I close it. "I mean to say, that I can't be associating with known Death Eaters. I'm trying to distance us from that."

"Business is business, Draco." She sips her tea. "The arrangement doesn't have to make the *Prophet*."

~*~

Thursday, November 25, 1999

Mr. Draco Malfoy,

Your request to visit prisoner number LM537 on December 2, 1999, has been declined. Pursuant to M.L.C. 8192, Section 4a, a prisoner can decline a visitation request for any reason.

I rub at my temples. I take a new parchment.

~*~

Saturday, November 27, 1999

Mr. Draco Malfoy,

Your request to visit prisoner number LM537 on December 3, 1999, has been declined. Pursuant to M.L.C. 8192, Section 4a, a prisoner can decline a visitation request for any reason.

I burn the letter. I take a new parchment.

Father,

You and I have several things to discuss as soon as possible. I have been busy cultivating a client base, securing office space, and meeting with potential investors. If you refuse to meet with me, how am I to guarantee the deposit of my inheritance?

See with this correspondence, a request for December 4. Hopefully that is a better time to fit me into your busy schedule.

Your son,

D.M.

~*~

Sunday, November 28, 1999

"Well, it's all very impressive, Draco." Mr. Harding sits back in his chair, squinting at the sunlight coming in through the restaurant windows. "I've never thought about expanding into the Muggle world."

"Muggle fashion is always growing. Usually at a much higher speed than the wizarding world," I say. I can feel my heart thud with the anticipation of closing a deal. "Jewelry - especially jewelry that shines as bright as Harding's - must follow."

"And you have the manpower and skills to transition Harding Jewelers into the Muggle world? We'd need financial advisers, business advisers, marketing advisers–"

"Absolutely," I say. "I'm hiring the best of the best in each of those departments–"

"But will they be experienced in the Muggle world?" he cuts me off, refolding his napkin in his lap. "No offense, Draco, but the Malfoy name isn't really associated with Muggles."

"My staff will be well versed– "

"'Will be.'" His eyes shine at me, bright as his diamonds. "Tell you what, after the consulting firm has been up and running for a bit, and after all your staff positions are filled, reach out again." He brushes his slacks, and stands from the table. "Once you get the hang of it all, we'll talk again."

I bite my tongue as we shake hands.

~*~

Monday, November 29, 1999

"Mr. Malfoy, I admit that I took this meeting as a kindness to your mother."

I nod. "Of course, Mr. Shafiq. I hope I can—"

"But I'm not interested in the Malfoy name anywhere near my finances, personal or professional."

I keep my congenial smile in place. "I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Shafiq. I hope you'll permit me to say that I understand your concerns, and I will be working very hard to rehabilitate the Malfoy name."

"How?" Mr. Shafiq's mustache twitches. He's not looking for any answers. Just teasing me.

I swallow. "I'll be focusing on Muggle relations. Several of our clients will be utilizing our services to transition their businesses into the Muggle world." He stares at me unblinking. "We'll be taking one *pro bono* case per quarter, focusing on those who need legal assistance in the Wizengamot—"

"And the magical creature world?" he asks. "Your history with house elves and werewolves is quite... well-known."

"As is our family's history with dragons." I'm close to losing my pleasant expression.

"Dragons and house elves are not the same." He pulls his coin purse, tossing a few sickles on the table for his tea.

"Oh, no," I say, throwing my hand out. "The tea is on me, Mr. Shafiq."

He drops the sickles and they clatter. "Save your galleons, Mr. Malfoy." He pulls his coat tight around him. "If you can only offer one sponsored case per quarter, cash must be tight."

He brushes past my chair as he leaves. The inside of my cheek bleeds from where my teeth dig into it.

~*~

Tuesday, November 30, 1999

Mr. Draco Malfoy,

Your request to visit prisoner number LM537 on December 4, 1999, has been declined. Pursuant to M.L.C. 8192, Section 4a, a prisoner can decline a visitation request for any reason.

If you represent the legal counsel for prisoner number LM537, please contact the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Administration Services.

Sincerely,

Ulysses Olyphant

Azkaban Visitation Coordinator

What could have changed?

I stare down at the letter from my old pal Ulysses.

What could prompt this behavior? Was this a refusal to sign away the inheritance? Or just simply a power play.

There hadn't been any *Prophet* photos from... last week. In the alley. Nothing for him to see.

Mother comes across me, staring down at the letter.

"Interesting mail?"

I clench my jaw, wondering if I should bring her into this.

"I..." I shake my head. "It's Father."

She stops her task of pulling on her gloves. "Yes?"

"He won't see me. Won't answer my letters."

She rips the parchment from my hands, looking it over. She scoffs.

She conjures a new page and a quill. She scribbles down in her elegant scrawl a request for herself for tomorrow, December 1.

"Send this off, would you?" She slaps the letter on the credenza and marches to the Floo.

A few hours later I tear apart the return letter addressed to her.

Mrs. Narcissa Black,

Your request to visit prisoner number LM537 on December 1, 1999, has been approved. Please see the attached documents for instruction on arrival and prohibited items.

I scowl down at Ulysses' response.

Perhaps Mother needs more credit.

~*~

Wednesday, December 1, 1999

If I had slept last night, this wouldn't have happened.

I would be awake enough to notice her in the Atrium. I would have swerved and headed to the café first instead of standing there waiting for the lift.

Once I am tucked in and standing against the back wall, she enters and smiles a small grin at me.

"Good morning," I say.

Several others start to fill the lift, and she shuffles to stand closer to me. I pull my arms to my side.

I assume the potion has left her system. Those ingredients were all temporary. But I don't want to risk it.

I remember the way her hips felt in my hands, and I wonder what would happen in this lift, with the Magical Games and Sports staff trapped in here with us. If I touch her wrist, and if the potion explodes in her veins. If she would be able to hold back or if she would force herself onto me, pushing me into the walls, hands dragging down my -

"You only have one more week left, yes?"

I keep my eyes forward, even. I feel her turn to me.

"Yes. Next Friday is my last day." I can make it eight more days. I can.

"That's exciting," she hums. "Is everything going swimmingly? With the consulting group?"

No. I almost laugh. I swallow down the sensation.

"So far, so good. We're on schedule to launch January 1st."

"That's wonderful," she says. "Congratulations." It's almost like she means it. The lift stops at Level 4 finally. "Have a great day," she says to me, turning to smile brightly over her shoulder as she leaves.

I nod to her, feeling more air coming into the elevator box now that she's left it.

Cold air.

I get home as Mother arrives back from Azkaban. I turn to her expectantly. She takes her time pulling off her gloves.

"Stew for dinner?" she asks.

"Sure."

She calls Mippy. The elf takes her belongings and starts on dinner. I wait.

"You will visit your father on Christmas," she says. "Azkaban allows holiday visits as well as the monthly-"

"Yes, I remember."

She nods at me. "You have nothing to worry about. The transaction will happen as planned."

She walks away from me.

"Mother?"

She turns back, and raises a brow. "Unless he wants a divorce. A messy one."

She leaves.

That night at dinner, I ask her for her help with clients and investors. She holds back her Cheshire grin, and I'm thankful that there's no "I told you so."

At breakfast the next day, Mother has a list of potential investors and potential clients. I raise my brow at her and she says, "You never asked."

On Friday, she asks me if I've thought about a charity branch of the consulting group.

It's been constantly on my mind.

"I think it would be important for the company's image to offer more charity work," she says, stirring in her milk. This is the fourth idea she has brought up today. It's like she's been holding back all of this before now, waiting for me to ask.

"I agree, I just think there will be resistance," I say. "I was thinking of starting with werewolf rights. So many of those laws are flawed. I sent a letter and proposal to Quentin Margolis and

the North Forest Pack last week, looking for support and testimonials. He told me I could fuck right off."

Mother quirks her lips downward at my foul language. "Did he?" She sips her tea.

"That was the intention." I roll my eyes. "Said they've been doing fine for years without help from the Malfoy family."

"Hm." She looks out the window. "Perhaps the Malfoy family shouldn't be the ones reaching out. Who else is on staff so far?"

I break off a piece of my scone. "Blaise in Marketing, Cuthbert Mockridge in Finances, and Dorothea Bulstrode in Admin. As well as a few –"

"All pure-blood," she states, straightening her knife and fork. I can hear the words before she's even taken breath. "Have you considered asking Hermione Granger if she has any interest?"

"She *has* a job, Mother."

"So did Dorothea before she agreed—"

"I believe Granger will soon be taking my position, working closely with Potter." I crumble my scone into small pieces. "She will be perfectly content."

"Doubtful, darling," she hums. I look up at her. She brings her teacup to her lips and before she sips, she says, "It took her almost a year to pass that dragon project. And she was working from *within* the Dragon Research Bureau." I watch her place her cup back on its saucer. "Perhaps she'd be interested in a part-time offer if she won't leave the Ministry. Give her the opportunity to help the magical creature community."

I stare down at my spoon. "Katya said something similar."

Mother lifts a brow. "Hm. Smarter than she looks." My lips quirk in a smile. "There's no harm in asking Hermione about it, is there?"

I swallow. "Things have gotten worse since she was last at the Manor, I'm afraid. She won't want anything to do with me anymore."

I refold my napkin in my lap, bringing the corners to meet and sliding the edges. Mother is silent. And then:

"You're a snake, Draco. And you've let her turn you into a worm."

My eyes snap to her, and she's standing, throwing her napkin down and calling Mippy to help her with the flower arrangements.

It stings me all day.

I can barely concentrate on the project Robards assigned me as I work in the conference room that day.

I drift off, wondering what it would be like to work with her on projects she's passionate about. Perhaps we'd meet twice a week, or have lunch on the weekends. She'd accompany me to dinners and balls, and we'd sweep the crowds, looking for the right people to talk to about how she wants to change the world. Her eyes would light with the same fire from when she fought for the dragon, and I deprived her of that pumpkin soup, and I could let my hand rest on her back, urging her to push further, to strike, to kill.

I can taste it.

I can smell her.

My eyes blink open. I check the hallway, make sure she's not visiting Katie Bell. Robards confirms that he didn't call her up, but I feel like I've summoned her. The scent of her.

It fades after an hour or so, but I'm still doodling more ideas about werewolves than I am about the smugglers apprehended last week.

On Saturday I stare at myself in the mirror for ten minutes, fussing with my hair and letting my walls fall away. Skeeter and her team left an hour ago. I had my interview for Witch Weekly and my photoshoot. Never before have I wondered what a girl should wear on a first date, but now it's running through my mind nonstop. My answer to Skeeter was so pathetic and generic.

Whatever makes her comfortable.

Skeeter raised a brow at me, took me off the record, and said, "Draco Malfoy would accept a woman wearing sweatpants to Le Porte Rouge?"

I winced and rephrased my answer into something more suave.

I pack up the leather folio, and give myself another look. I look very young. And vulnerable. I hate it, but I know it's necessary.

I pass Mother in the dining room on the way out.

"Draco, darling."

I retrace my steps and poke my head in. "Yes?"

"I am addressing invitations to the launch party today. I think having Mr. Potter and Miss Weasley in attendance would be excellent publicity." She looks up at me. "But only if we are inviting Hermione."

I swallow. "I'll let you know this afternoon."

She looks me over, sees my satchel bag and my twitching fingers. She smiles. "Alright."

I pop through to Diagon Alley. I pace the path to Cornerstone four times before finally taking a deep breath and yanking the door open. I find her at the counter, throwing something away and closing the ledger book. She greets me and then looks up, and in the moments before her eyes land on me, I consider telling her I have the wrong shop, apologizing, and turning around.

"Oh, hello." Her eyes brighten.

"Granger." I jerk my head in greeting, climbing the steps to the counter.

"Did you... did you have a book on reserve?" She turns to the shelves. It's all very polite.

I contemplate jumping right in, and not wasting any more of her precious time. But instead I tell her I'll browse for a bit.

"Wonderful," she squeaks. And I worry for a second that it's fear. The tightening of her features, the overly bright eyes. And then she's rounding the counter. "There's actually… um… quite a few new titles since you were here last."

And she's walking away into the fiction section. It takes me an embarrassingly long time to realize that I am supposed to follow her. She leads me to a shelf, and I try to ignore the four or five patrons who glance up at us.

"There's a new novel out, based loosely on a Muggle book from the 1980s," she says, fingers moving over the book in question. "Dystopian future, marriage law, regulations on bearing children." She looks up at me. "In my opinion the Muggle book is better, but no one's heard of it here, so…"

She looks between my each of my eyes, and I wonder if she's waiting for a response. She moves away and I follow.

She shows me a horror book, one she says she wouldn't like and I can't imagine liking it either. But her fingers trace the spine, and her eyes can't look up at me anymore. There's pink on her cheeks and I wonder what she's embarrassed about. She leads me away, and I see her glance at a young woman in one of the comfortable chairs before turning down an aisle.

"The last one I wanted to show you… Here." I turn down the aisle just in time to see her bend at the waist, denims pulling tight across her backside. My eyes are glued to her as she rises, pulling a book off the bottom shelf. "A new biography on Chadwick Boot," she says. And I manage to bring my eyes to her face.

She's rambling about Terry Boot. She's blushing, and her eyes are away from me. Does she know that she's tucked us away from prying eyes, into our own space in the stacks where anything could happen? I look down at her hands, brushing over the cover of the book.

She's never done this. Never shown me things she wanted me to read.

"I'll take all three." I look back her, and she drinks me in.

"Really? Er… Wonderful." She smiles at me, and I wonder how easy it would be to forget Marcus Flint ever happened. Forget my father. She looks down, lashes fluttering. "I – I mean… I didn't mean to force these on you." She laughs, a strangled sound. "You are welcome to browse, of course."

"No, no," I say. I take the book from her, almost brushing her thumb. And I slip back into a different character. Someone closer to who Skeeter thinks I am. "If Hermione Granger recommends a new book to read, then I'd be a fool not to listen to her."

She stutters. She blinks. She goes to collect the other books and she pushes past me, her hips against my thigh.

If she's back to blushing... Back to dark eyes when she looks at me... Brushing up against me...

I smirk at the empty aisle.

I follow her to the counter, trying to remember my plan and trying to work seduction into it now.

"I actually wanted to ask you for something."

I look away from her down to the counter, totally at her mercy. And I feel her eyes on me.

"Anything."

Fuck.

Marry me.

Let me keep you.

Fuck.

My blood warms. My mouth dries. And as I wonder who's seducing whom, I build a wall from the top down, like a castle gate lowering. I finally look at her face again. Her neck is flushed. I move forward.

"You are acquainted with Quentin Margolis?"

The tension leaves her eyes and she examines me. "The werewolf leader? I suppose I am. He's been in the office several times, and after the war he wanted me and Harry to introduce him to Teddy Lupin…" She refocuses. "Why do you ask?"

"I am hoping to take him on as a client," I say. "Well, him and his pack." I speak the words I've been practicing all morning. "He's been… unresponsive to the owls I've sent to him. And I'm beginning to think it's my name, my reputation." I look away. "My history with Greyback."

"I see." She busies her hands with the ledger. "Well, Quentin spends very little time away from the pack. It's possible your letters haven't been received?"

"Oh, they have." I grin at the counter. "'Unresponsive' was the nice way of saying it, but he's let me know that he has no interest in meeting me."

The quill between her fingers moves in circles and I watch her dexterous fingers twirl it around, ready to play my hand.

"It might be a matter of money," she says. "The community may not be able to afford your services. Werewolves have a hard time earning and keeping employment –"

"That's what we're fighting for. Equal rights for werewolves. Anti-discrimination laws."

I watch her physically lose her breath. "Anti-discrimination laws?"

Her eyes are wide and she searches for something in my face. I keep my mind closed, and watch as her mind works. Watch as she pieces together what it is I'm trying to do. Something lights in her face and I almost feel guilty, playing her like this. But there's no lie. I'm going to be helping the werewolf community. It's just not for them. It's for my reputation.

And for her.

"I just need an 'in.' A recommendation."

"Of course," she breathes. "I'll write to Quentin on your behalf."

"You will?" I say. She nods. "I have… here…" I fumble with the clasp on my bag, anxious to get the leather portfolio into her fingers. "Here is the proposal. If you'd like to familiarize yourself with it at all."

She stares down at it like I'm handing her the keys to the Hogwarts library. "I'll have it back to you on Monday," she says.

"Thank you, Granger."

She smiles at me. A real smile. And I can't breathe until she looks away, down at the ledger book.

"Is your team taking you out for a celebration on your last day?"

I don't understand the question for a moment. "Er, no. I don't think so."

She stands up from leaning over the book and pushes a curl behind her ear before I can do it for her. "That won't do," she says. "Harry and I will have to plan something then."

I think of the only way I'd ever want to celebrate anything, and it certainly doesn't involve Potter. She's waiting for me to say something, and her eyes flit to my lips.

"You… don't have to," I manage to say.

"Of course we do. We'll have to do something truly embarrassing, like print your face on a cake."

"That must be a Muggle tradition."

"Absolutely." She laughs. And like the smile, it's a true laugh. "We'll do Friday after work? On your last day. I'll have Harry spread the word at Level 2." I watch her teeth drag across her bottom lip. "Bring Katya if you'd like."

She looks down at the books again. I blink.

"Or Noelle. Or whoever's on rotation for Fridays." She laughs. And it's not like the last one, but she's trying to bring up our game - the girl for every day of the week.

Maybe I've been reading her wrong. Always wrong.

Maybe Katya and I should have had a public break up.

"You'll have to tell me how the horror novel is. I don't think I can get through it." She stuffs it into the bag, and I realize she's rambling. The color on her cheeks gives her away.

"Thank you. For writing to Quentin Margolis."

I take the bag from her, and she says, "Of course. Anything you need."

I paste on a smirk, and let my eyes slide over her. "Careful, Granger. I may just take you up on that."

Her lips break into a grin, pink on her cheeks, and she looks away.

And I walk out the door hearing Blaise's voice.

Anyone can be seduced.

And I have been.

I drop by the dining room when I get home, finding Mother working on her invitations. I grab a biscuit from her tray, seeing an envelope addressed to Hermione Granger set aside.

I tap it with my pinkie.

"Send it."

She grins up at me.

~*~

Monday, December 6, 1999

"I'll be completely honest with you, Draco. I have some reservations."

"That doesn't surprise me," I say. I send him a grin.

Wentworth tosses back the rest of his Butterbeer, signaling the barkeep for another. I guess we're staying. That's good.

"You have a hard path forward. I don't mean to say that you can't weather it, but it will be difficult. Do you have any companies or individuals on your roster that don't represent the pure-bloods or the wealthy?"

I think it must be his honesty… or maybe the Butterbeer when I say flatly, "Not yet."

He nods, looking down at the table, thinking. "It may take a while for the wizarding world to trust you again."

"I know."

He looks up at me and gives me a weak smile. "Regardless of having the 'Most Charming Smile, December 1999.'"

I roll my eyes. Skeeter's Witch Weekly article came out this morning. Wentworth chuckles.

"I am hoping to kick off the New Year with a project to help fight for equal rights in the werewolf community. I'm already in contact with the North Forest Pack, and I hope to be meeting with them soon."

It wasn't lying. It was optimism.

Our second round arrives, and Wentworth sits back in his chair. "That's a start. I just wish you had more diversity. In your clients and in your staff."

"I hope to gain more staff from our January scouting and hiring. After my Mother's – After my launch party."

"Yes," Wentworth says wryly. "The New Year's Eve party that the ninety-nine percent have never been invited to." He lifts a brow at me.

"Hey," I say, spreading my arms wide. "You got your invitation *this* year, yes?"

Wentworth grins. "Yes, yes."

"It will be rescinded should you say no to the job, of course," I tease.

He hums. He seems to be waiting for something. Waiting for me to give him a good enough reason.

I take a large swallow of my drink, feeling my throat expand around the liquid forced into me.

"I am hoping to bring Hermione Granger on. On a case-to-case basis."

And his face relaxes, brows lift. And there it is.

"Really?" His voice lilts, like a fine wine has crossed his tongue.

"She's working on the werewolf project with me now. And I hope to bring her on for several other cases as well."

"Would she leave the Ministry for you?"

For me.

"For me? Never," I say, smiling into my Butterbeer.

"But for the werewolves, she might. Yeah?"

I look up at Wentworth. He's calculating. His fingers tapping on the table.

He starts asking about my business model, my inheritance, the size of the staff. He throws a few names into the air of people to talk to and I struggle to pick them up without whipping out a quill and parchment. He asks if my father will be involved at all.

By the time both of our drinks are drained, he wipes his hand down his mouth and says, "Give me a few days. I have my wife's birthday this week, and we'll need to discuss a few things." He looks out the window of the pub, then back at me. "And keep on wooing Hermione Granger."

I smirk.

"Will do."

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Wednesday, December 8, 1999

I'm dropping off a portkey request for Robards on Level 6 when I find her in the elevators.

I feel myself grin before I can stop it.

"Granger."

She mumbles a hello, her eyes shifting away from me like a nervous child. We're alone in the lift, and I don't bother standing far from her. Our bodies touch when the box takes off.

"I heard back from Quentin Margolis," I say, and that catches her attention. She turns up to me, eyes bright.

"And?"

"He's agreed to meet with me next week."

Her face breaks into a smile. "That's wonderful news. I'm … I'm so happy for you."

And again, I imagine this look on her with every success, with every signed contract, with every case won against the Wizengamot.

"I can't thank you enough, Granger." I let my eyes relax over her face, drinking her in. The lift slows for Level 5 and I tear my eyes from her.

"I'm just glad you asked me. I'm very impressed by the whole proposal."

I wonder if I ask her now. If I say, *You know, Granger, you would be a valuable asset to Malfoy Consulting. We could affect true change together.*

Granger, do you really want to work at the D.M.L.E.?

Tell me what you want and I'll give it to you.

A portly man in yellow joins the lift. I'll have to refine this a bit before speaking with her next.

"I hear there's a party for me at a pub on Friday night." I pout and look to her.

"Is there?" She lifts her brows. "Perhaps it's more of a celebration of you leaving."

"That must be it."

I wish it had been like this all the time. This casual flirting, letting our hips touch in tight spaces, waiting to see her eyes darken.

I'm looking down but I can feel her eyes on me. The lift slows for Level 4 just as I look up, catching her. She swallows, and her gaze moves away. She brushes a curl back and says, "Have a good day, Malfoy."

I nod as she darts off the lift. I grin at my shoes.

On Friday, Katie Bell, Potter, Goldstein and I head over to the same pub we went to that first time, where she'd gotten a bit sloshed and had let me talk to her, let me look at her. Where I'd called her golden.

Potter buys the first round, and I take my Firewhisky quickly, enjoying the burn.

Robards stops by, thanking me for my time and expertise, and I almost remind him that it was a court ordered assignment, but I just shake his hand.

A few of the Aurors show up, the ones who didn't give me any trouble in the office. I'm on my second Firewhisky, keeping a careful eye on the door.

I'll get her to talk to me about the consulting firm, mention the possibility of working with giants next, and drop hints to my five-year plan for the house elves. Tell her I'm looking for someone to bounce ideas off of, and would it be alright if I invited her to lunch once in a while. And we might even have a whole branch for magical creature rights, do you know anyone who might be interested?

It's getting closer to seven, and several people head out to their Friday night plans. Goldstein buys me another drink, clearly in it for the long haul tonight. I look toward the door again.

"She's ill."

I look up to find Katie Bell watching me.

"Sorry?"

"Hermione left work early today. Ill."

A cold weight in my stomach. "Oh. Hope she feels better."

"I should have told you earlier," Katie says, eyeing me over the top of her water glass. "So you wouldn't have been waiting on her."

I keep her eyes. I think about denying it. Or sneering at her. Or coming up with something quippy. Or even turning my charm on her, something like, *But the crowd here is just as lovely.* With a wink.

But I did curse her three years ago with dark magic. So, I decide to let her see through me.

It doesn't truly sink in until the following morning that she missed my party. The party she insisted on. The party she planned.

~*~

Thursday, August 25, 1994

"Hadn't you better be hurrying along, now? You wouldn't like her spotted, would you?"

I lift my chin at Granger, and I turn in time to see a flash of fear in her eyes. A spell goes off from the campsite. And she's silhouetted by green.

Potter and Weasley jump, but her gaze is on me. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Why, thank you for asking.

"Granger, they're after Muggles," I condescend. I roll my eyes. "D'you want to be showing off your knickers in midair? Because if you do, hang around... They're moving this way, and it would give us all a laugh."

She crosses her arms in front of herself, pulling her coat tight, and I wonder what the prude has hiding under there. I look her up and down in a way to make her uncomfortable.

"Hermione's a witch," Potter hisses at me.

"Have it your own way, Potter." I say, taking my eyes off Granger's calves, and rolling my back against the tree trunk I'm against. "If you think they can't spot a Mudblood, stay where you are."

Weasley tries to pipe in. Tries to defend her, but he's useless. She steps in front of him and glares at me. I smile back.

A loud explosion, closer. The three of them jump and turn. They don't see me jump as well. I relax back as screaming fills the trees.

"Scare easily, don't they?" I say. "I suppose your daddy told you all to hide?" I say to Weasley. "What's he up to - trying to rescue the Muggles?"

"Where're your parents?" Potter snarls at me. "Out there wearing masks, are they?"

I turn to him, a pleasant grin. "Well...if they were, I wouldn't be likely to tell you, would I, Potter?"

"Oh, come on," Granger says. "Let's go and find the others." She shoots a glare at me.

I let them walk past until I can yell after them: "Keep that big bushy head down, Granger."

I see her spine straighten, and she grabs Weasley by his scruff to keep him from coming after me. I'm smiling to myself, watching the fire through the trees, and wondering what kind of knickers Granger wears.

Probably cotton, something so sexless. Perfunctory.

I've caught sight of Tracey Davis changing after she spilled potions all over herself. A purple lace. Barely a scrap of cloth.

Blaise has brought dirty magazines into the dorms, so I know there's a few types of knickers and bras.

But Granger... probably pale and muted colors, probably a sports bra.

I watch as a tent explodes.

~*~

Wednesday, December 15, 1999

Quentin Margolis has let me talk for half an hour. He's not said a word. His fingers steepled in front of his chin. I'm at the edge of the North Forest, sitting on a fucking log, trying to make a good impression on him.

I try to wrap up my presentation. He stares at me when I'm finished and says, "I thought Miss Granger would be with you."

I blink at him. "She's an associate of mine, but she's not working directly on this case."

He nods. He sits back.

"I'll consider it, Mr. Malfoy. It's not something I truly think we need, but I'll talk it over with them." He stands and I try to mask my disappointment. I hold my hand out to shake, and he examines it. "If Miss Granger was working directly on this, I'd be more inclined."

He walks away, without taking my hand.

~*~

Friday, December 17, 1999

I sit down with Mockridge, have him look at the financials. He asks me if I'm truly comfortable investing my entire inheritance in this project, and I confirm.

"I'm thinking of a Non-Wizard Relations branch," I say toward the end of the meeting.

He raises his brows at me. "Like house elves? Goblins?"

"Werewolves, yes."

He opens the portfolio back up. He twists his lips together for a few minutes, running maths in his head.

"For what purpose," he finally asks, looking up at me and taking his glasses off.

"Publicity," I say. It's not a lie. It's just not the whole truth.

He nods. "Yes, I can see how that would help, but..." He flips a page, finger running down the projected revenue. "Who would be paying for this branch? Do you know werewolves who would pay for representation?"

I breathe deep. "No."

He gives me an expression that says, *Well, that's that.*

"I think it might be imperative. For the image of the company," I say.

He nods, sighing. "Do you have enough time to split your focus like that? That's a full-time commitment. Or is that an entire other salary." He winces, like another salary at this point would be hazardous.

"I was thinking Hermione Granger."

He pauses, staring down at the projected expenditures page. "Hm." He flips a few pages. He pulls a quill, jotting a few numbers down. I wait, not knowing what this discovery will mean.

He looks out the window, grey eyebrows twitching. "She will have to pull in capital just from her name alone."

"That's what I'm counting on."

~*~

Saturday, December 25, 1999

There is only one obstacle standing in the way of Hermione Granger working at Malfoy Consulting.

Well, two, if you count Granger's acceptance. Which I didn't. That was so far beyond the problem.

I dip the comb into the gel, and plaster my hair to my head, like he taught me.

I need a guarantee that the inheritance will be in my accounts on January 1st. That is my primary focus. Once I have the money, he will never need to know that Granger will be working under me—

A series of images of her under me—

—with me. It's not like I've disobeyed him. There is no ring on her finger. He said I could have the inheritance if I stayed away from her.

I am at the point where I *need* the inheritance.

I have a pain in my gut as I sign in at Azkaban. I put her out of my mind. I build a wall, and close the lid on her box.

The guard opens the door and I find him standing behind the two-person table, back to the door. Completely uninterested in me.

"Good morning, Father."

He turns, and takes me in. "Miss Granger is *much* prettier in person than in the papers," he says. "And a good deal prettier than she was at school."

My eye twitches, and he's looking me over. I have nothing to say to that, so I move forward with directness.

"I would have been here on December 1st, but you refused to meet with me or answer my letters."

"Your mother and I had several things to discuss." He raises his brows. "But Happy Christmas, Draco. I'm so glad to see you today."

I carefully pull the chair away from the table, and take a seat. He watches me. I look back up at him. "Happy Christmas, Father."

He smirks, and takes his chair.

I continue, "One week from today is January 1st. That is the day you agreed you would sign the inheritance paperwork." I clench my jaw. "Are we still on schedule?"

He looks curiously over my left ear, taking control. "You know, Draco," he says. "I have so many questions about her. But the primary of which is… how was it that Miss Granger already knew about that Auction business?"

He chuckles. Like a toddler has just said something terribly funny.

So, they *had* talked about the Auction. I curl my fingers against my pant legs, physically restraining myself from asking him about their conversation.

"Seeing as Mother is hosting a launch party in six days, I would like to discuss Malfoy Consulting Group –"

"And I would like to discuss her."

Her face swims in through my mind.

Anything you need.

I sit back and clasp my hands in my lap, giving him control. He grins at me, without teeth. He crosses his legs, leaning back.

"How are things progressing with you two?" he says.

"They're not." I focus on painting her into a corner.

"That's not what I've heard."

I blink at him. What could he possibly…

He reaches into an interior pocket and pulls two pieces of paper. No. Photographs. He lays them on the table in front of me, and I am assaulted by the image of her wild hair and wild hands as they grapple to pull me close, her lips caressing my neck and my fingers gripping her hips. A cursory glance at the other one shows me stepping into her, ready to take her against the brick wall as she bruises my wrist—

I tear my eyes away and press my lids closed. "What is this? Why do you have this?"

"You know, Draco. It's such a strange juxtaposition. The way she grips you closer here, and the way she bolted from this room at the mere suggestion of marrying you."

My eyes snap to his, and I can see her throwing herself against me just at the bottom edge of my vision.

"And *why* would that be a topic of conversation for the two of you." I can barely grit out the words.

My mother's voice rings in my ears – *And she made it clear that you never will be.*

"Irrelevant." He waves his hand as if he hadn't just opened a door in my mind. "I'm just impressed with the progress the two of you have made."

I glance at the pictures again. Something tickles my mind –

"Are you working with Marcus?"

He lifts a brow. He's caught off guard.

"Flint? Gabriel's boy?" He tilts his head. "How is he involved?"

Innocence. Confusion from him. I need to change the subject before he thinks on that further.

"So, you're just… having me followed?" I hiss.

"Of course not, Draco." He pouts. "I'm having *her* followed."

I see red on the edges of my vision, so I start to build a hut on the beach. Branches and sticks and I shove her inside.

"I've been having her watched since the moment she left Hogwarts," he continues. "She's a very boring person when she's not seducing you, I'm afraid." He sighs. "Not at all suited for the position of Lady Malfoy."

I stand. The chair scrapes backwards.

"She is not in the running any longer." I lean on the table. "This"–and I shove the pictures towards him—"was an isolated incident that you have no business knowing the truth of."

He eyes the photographs fluttering back to the table. "I have copies. You can take those with you. Place them in the bottom drawer of your closet with the others."

My eyes widen. I turn away from him, embarrassment like a wave of heat rolling through me. I stare at the stone door, wondering what would happen if I just ran.

"What is it you want, Father?" I say, and my voice fights against my closing throat. "I need that inheritance. What would you ask of me."

"I want to know what your plan is for her," he lilts, and I can tell without looking that he's crossed his legs, casual and calm. "You obviously can't stay away from each other –"

"We can," I jump him. I turn back. "We will. Like I said, this was isolated." I gesture to the pictures. "Our relationship is purely platonic." I push the words out, and dissolve the image of her smiling at me in the lifts, the way her eyes burned with the passion for the werewolves.

Anything you need.

I'm digging through my brain, trying to find support for this platonic relationship. Something to prove that we're not together—

And you never will be—

And he's asked for my "plan for her" and I can hear the words tumbling before I've decided if it's smart or not. "I'm going to convince her to join Malfoy Consulting."

He blinks slowly, grinning at the table. "Are you now." He chuckles. "And how will that help your… current situation."

I snarl at him, "My 'current situation' is that the wizarding world still does not trust me, thanks to you and your *Lord*. My 'current situation' is that the only clients that have signed on with Malfoy Consulting Group are the wealthy or pure-blood or family friends."

I suck oxygen into my body.

He presses his lips together. He looks at the wall over my shoulder. "And what... *position* will you be offering Miss Granger?"

I ignore his quip and say, "Senior Consultant. Managing a new branch for magical creatures."

His lips twitch. He takes a breath and stares down at his thumbs. "You know, Draco, there are other Mudbloods out there that are fully capable of the position, and will clean up your act just as nicely. Ones you don't have such a scattered history with."

"Name me one that will give me half as much publicity and good opinion as Hermione Granger." Her name is acrid against my tongue as I use it in the way he wants me to.

He taps a knuckle on the table, mind working. "Office romance can be so… tawdry, you know. One bad sexual harassment case in this day and age could set you just as off course—"

"That won't be an issue. The Ministry has regulations on new businesses regarding sexual harassment and employee conduct –"

"Oh, yes, and I'm positive inter-office dating and screwing has been abolished by that." He chuckles again.

"I will draft up the Office Romance stipulations and send them to you for approval." I sigh. I stand in front of him, helpless. "What else do you want?"

He studies me. "And you think these... guidelines and signed documents will help? You seem to have a problem with restraint when it comes to her." His hands drift over the photographs, and I see my body connect with hers, hands going to her hips—

"It won't be a problem," I say. He stares into me, and to prove a point, I feel his mind against my own. I slam my wall up. It cracked at some point in the past ten minutes. Probably when he showed me the pictures, or when I stepped into the room. "I am in complete control of myself."

He brushes against my mind again, and then tears his eyes from me, moving this thumbs in circles. He can't dismiss me. Not yet. I need his word.

"The Consulting Group needs her. I need her." My voice shakes and I want to electrocute myself. "And I need the inheritance. What do I need to give you?"

His lips twist, something difficult in his expression. "Alright."

I feel a spring bounce in my chest.

"You can have your Mudblood," he says. My eye doesn't twitch at the word. He says, "But I want ten weeks."

"Ten weeks of what?"

"Every Tuesday for ten weeks, you will receive a tenth of the inheritance transferred into your accounts at 9PM," he purrs.

I calculate in my head and find that a tenth in the first week is sufficient, and a second tenth in the second week is also sufficient. These demands are oddly specific.

"What is this contingent upon?" I ask.

"Nothing, Draco," he waves his hand, and I see the ghost of where his wand would twirl between his fingers. "But I do want you to visit. In January and in February."

My eyes dart about the room, considering.

"Every Tuesday? The first deposit will be on January 4th?"

"That is correct."

He looks resigned. He looks like he's exhausted from compromise. I am not sure what it is he has lost, but he seems he has lost a great deal.

I nod. I wonder if I should shake his hand. I *absolutely* should make him sign to it, but that would be an insult I can't afford.

I turn from the table. We both know this visit was a business meeting, not a Christmas reunion.

"Be sure to secure her a corner office, Draco."

I look to him, questioning. He's examining his nails.

"And the proper support staff," he says. "You can't just sit her down in a cubicle and expect the clients to pour in."

He says it like he's told me a thousand times, like he's reminding me how to care for my Nimbus 2001.

"Yes, Father," I say, my hand on the door. I wish I could just leave and be done with it, but I hear myself asking, "Anything else?"

He swivels to face me, like I'm leaving his office.

"Don't botch the proposal, Draco." His eyes glimmer at his private joke.

~*~

Friday, December 31, 1999

Mother's outdone herself.

It's the first time I've stepped into the drawing room since the renovation. I don't recognize the place. The pathway to the ballroom is still there, but even the fireplace has moved. Four chandeliers instead of the one large one.

"Narcissa, darling! This place is gorgeous!"

I turn to see Blaise escorting Mother in, her hand wrapped around his arm.

"It was Draco's idea to redecorate," Mother says, pointing to one of the new tapestries. "I just managed the work, really."

They meet me in the middle of the room, near one of the ice sculptures. Mother says, "Now, not too much Firewhisky before the guests arrive, you two. I'm headed up to change."

She glides away, and I kick Blaise's knee out when I see him follow her with his eyes.

"Ow! What? She's going by Black, isn't she? Draco, I could be your new Papa."

I roll my eyes and pull a bottle of champagne from the bar. One of the hired elves produces glasses and I thank her.

Blaise knocks my glass with his. "To Malfoy-Zabini Consulting." He tips it back, and drains the whole thing.

I shake my head at him. "Dream on."

He pours himself another. "So, what's the plan tonight. Who do you want me to focus on?"

I watch as a different elf starts the charms for indoor falling snow. "Mr. Bradley will be here. I'd like a meeting with him next week."

"Done."

"If Mr. Huddles brings his wife, you can focus on her and her clothing line."

"Love focusing on wives. Great."

"And Daphne will be here. So, you can focus on keeping things civil." I raise a brow at him and sip.

He takes a deep breath, eye on the snowfall. "Civil is my middle name."

"Pansy couldn't make it. She's in Spain."

"That's fine. She hasn't spoken to me anyway," Blaise says, and I see his lips twist. "You still haven't contacted Greg?"

I drain my glass. "I... just don't see the point."

Blaise fiddles with a bar napkin. "But your new best friend Harry Potter is coming tonight, yes?"

"I wouldn't call him a *best* friend," I say. "He pushed me down some stairs last month." I move away from the bar as Blaise spits his champagne.

I lead him into the ballroom, watching a few of the musicians set up. A house elf in a black bonnet lets us know that we have about half an hour before the guests start to arrive.

"And Granger?" Blaise prods. "She's on the list, I saw."

"Yes." Maybe that's all I need to say.

"I also saw her on the roster for M.C.G." Blaise lifts a brow.

"Yes." I scratch my jaw. "That will be my focus for the night."

He blinks at me. "You haven't secured her?"

"I haven't asked her."

He leans back against a pillar. "I... You..." He shakes his head. "Several people already think she's involved."

"Yes."

"Wentworth mentioned it to me last week actually. And that new client you threw me said she was quite thrilled to possibly work with her."

"Yes."

"And she hasn't even put in her two weeks' notice yet?"

Blaise stares at me with wide eyes. I down my second champagne glass.

"Just make sure I'm ready for my speech at ten minutes to midnight, Blaise."

I walk away from him and start running through what I'll say at midnight until Mippy announces that the first guests will be arriving shortly.

Once I've shaken enough hands to exhaust me, Blaise finds me again when Mr. Bradley arrives. We chat with him and set up a dinner date for next week to talk about his business.

The Greengrass sisters say hello, Daphne's eyes never landing on Blaise, and we're whispering about Pansy's wild success when Blaise leans into me.

"She's here," Blaise says, his eyes tripping over the entryway.

I nod.

"Fuck, she looks good."

I swallow my champagne. Blaise looks at me, watching my face.

"Well, if you're not going to go flirt with her, I will."

I turn to roll my eyes at him and he's gone. I watch him strut, picking up two champagne glasses from a passing tray.

My eyes are glued to them, but Daphne steps in to me and whispers, "Is he seeing anyone?"

I turn to her, trying to get the image of Granger's bright smile out of my head. She might have been in white... "Daphne. I am not Pansy. Please don't mistake me for someone who cares."

Daphne's blue eyes stare innocently back at me. "Oh, I only ask because he's currently salivating over Hermione Granger." My eye twitches, but I refrain from looking back at them. *Restraint*. "But she'd never fall for that boozy charm, would she?"

Daphne lifts a haughty brow and struts away. I let myself look over at them once more just as Blaise leans in and whispers something against her ear.

"Astoria." And the girl appears in front of me. Like magic. "Can you get Blaise for me?"

She disappears, and I smile cordially at several of Mother's friends.

When Blaise returns he jostles my shoulder and says, "How deep is this attachment, Draco? Because I think I have a chance."

I glare at him over my third glass of champagne and he smiles back.

Granger is swept into the crowd for the next few hours. I see glimpses of her, like a melody you can't quite place. Mother finds me trying to slip behind a portrait a bit before midnight to run through my speech.

"Are you prepared?" she asks.

"Not really."

"Are you sober?"

"Not really."

She huffs and rolls her eyes. "Why don't you get some fresh air? Take a moment to yourself." She leads me to one of the side balconies overlooking the gardens. "I'll make sure someone gets you before midnight."

I nod and duck through the curtains, waiting for the cold air to slap against my body. But instead, a flash of heat, shivering upwards.

She's on the balcony. Her dress *is* white. Someone's done something grand to her hair, falling like snow against her shoulders. And beneath her tangles her back dips low, low. Tight skin across her ribs, expanding and twisting to look at me. Her lips open and I struggle to keep my eyes on her face when presented with the rest of her.

Restraint.

I push through the thick air, coming to stand next to her while she looks out over the gardens. Again, I wonder if she likes it.

"You know, Draco, it's a Black and White party. Your silver accents are truly throwing off the whole aesthetic." She tosses the words out over the grounds, a small smile drifting through her lips.

"Ah, but I am the host. I must distinguish myself from the rest of the rabble," I say, smiling.

She looks away towards the gazebo.

"It's a beautiful party. I've never been to a Narcissa Malfoy New Year's Eve Bash. Is it always this grand?"

I step closer to the stone ledge, trying to see what she sees.

"Just about. Twice as many people."

"All clamoring to be nearer to the winner of Most Charming Smile, December 1999," she says. Merlin, I hope she didn't read that drivel.

"I heard you were drawing quite a crowd yourself, Granger."

I trace her jaw with my eyes, drinking in the angle where her chin comes to a point. She turns her head to me, and she's got makeup on again, darkening her eyes and staining her lips, and drawing me towards her shapes.

Restraint.

I cast my eyes on the gazebo. I place her inside of it, and seal the structure shut with ivy.

"Where is Katya tonight?" she asks, and I hear her voice trip over the name. How strange that there is still Katya between us.

I want to tell her about the lie, about the arrangement, but my focus needs to be on getting her to trust me.

"She's in Bulgaria for the holidays." It's not a lie. "She is still desperate to sit down with you."

"Well, I would be open to that. She's lovely." She pauses for a moment. "How's the inheritance transfer coming along?"

I search her with wary eyes. I'd love to never discuss this money with her again.

She says, "I remember you saying that your father would release it on January 1st. Is everything... falling into place?"

But there's also an opening here... if I can navigate it.

"My father is…" I hesitate. What exactly is my father? "...being slightly difficult, of course." I let my eyes drift, like Lucius Malfoy is just paperwork to complete. "He says he'll transfer portions of it over the next months. The first portion will transfer this Tuesday."

Four days of financially faking it. My shoulders inch to my ears.

"But enough about that," I say. I twist around delicately, leaning my back against the stone railing, turning my head to her. Like we're strangers who met at a bar. And I'm just getting to know her before taking her home. I blink away the dreams, focusing on a series of stone

railings that can hold her in place, tucking her away until I can concentrate. "Will you be taking the analyst position with Robards?"

She pauses before saying, "It's a possibility."

There's a blush at her neck, and I let her out of her box for just a moment to imagine her pink skin dipping lower under her modest neckline.

Restraint.

I can almost feel the champagne glass crack between my tight fingers.

"There are a few positions open, that I'm interested in. I had two interviews this week."

"They didn't truly make you interview?" I say, and she twists her long neck to watch me curiously. "So you sent in the wrong resume again? I've told you before, it just needs to say Golden Girl across the top." I bring my glass to my lips before I say something else. She smiles. "Where else? What other positions?"

Who do I have to buy off if this proposal fails?

"House-Elf Relocation." She shifts her glass around, and I love that she holds it like a cup, her full hand around it, and I think of the charms teachers who would hiss at her for it.

"You don't want to work in House-Elf Relocation, Granger." I smile down at the stones. This is going to be easy.

She straightens, turning her chest to me. "Oh, I don't?"

"You don't want to sit in an office, filing reports on Elf beatings and misuse, only to pull them from their current homes and place them with a different set of masters to beat them. You don't want to work under the current legislations."

A pause, and I can feel her gravitating toward me. "And what is it I do want to do?"

Looking back up at her face, I can see that she's waiting. Holding her breath for me.

"You want to create the law. You want to change the world. You can't change the Ministry from within. And you can't do anything from your cubicle in the Beast Division, Special Concentration in Dragon Research and Restraint."

Her eyes move over my face.

"So you think I should take the position in the Auror Office?"

Perfect. Right where I want her.

"Until they offer you Minister of Magic, that would be the best choice between the two. Upward mobility at least."

She turns back toward the lake, thinking. Always thinking.

"You have a speech at midnight?" she asks.

"Yes," I say, just now remembering. "'Thanks for coming, best millennium ever,' all that rot."

"You came out here to practice, didn't you?" she teases. I nod. "What else are you going to say?"

Yes, I suppose I should figure this out. Should have written something down, really.

"Well, a bit about recruitment." I shift on my feet, shifting gears. "Mother invited a lot of Hogwarts, Durmstrang, and Beauxbatons recent graduates. Young witches and wizards who are looking for careers," I say. "Some elite members of society, too. We're either looking to hire senior positions or take their companies on as clients."

Her eyes smile at me, and I think about how we could do this always – discuss strategy and attack, she and I.

"You're going to steal people away from their high-ranking government and private industry jobs tonight? With one midnight speech?" she demands, voice laughing.

I watch as she teases me, not knowing she's talking about herself. Her lips twist into a grin and she asks me how. How I plan to take her. How I plan to keep her.

"Anyone can be seduced, Granger."

And something happens to her eyes. And she looks at my mouth. And before I can process that what it means, what she wants from me, she looks away, eyes dragging over the gardens.

I've done it somehow. She wants me. She desires me. I feel the air spinning between us, my feet gliding closer, and she licks her lips and I almost reach for her.

I can't even remember the word I've been hissing to myself all night, can't envision a brass-lined jewelry box.

She's warm. She's almost panting and I think I can have it all if I do this right.

She wants me, but she won't be mine.

She won't stay forever.

Something changed when she met with my father, and I have been desperate to know.

My eyes drift down her bare arm, tracing the fabric of her backless dress, and my hand has a mind of its own, reaching up to soothe the fabric through my fingers.

"What did my father say to you?" My lips almost touch her ear.

She gasps, and I realize my fingers have slithered to her ribs.

Tell me. Tell me please how to fix his lies.

"Draco?"

I drop my arm, heart thumping, but the air is cold again.

Blaise saunters toward us, hands in his pockets. "You gave me one job tonight, mate. 'Make sure I'm ready for my speech at ten minutes to midnight.'"

Fuck. I'm out of time. I glance at her and Blaise steps in.

"I'll take care of her, Draco." He fucking winks at me. "She can stand with me."

I watch as she takes his arm, still looking at me with thick lashes.

I jerk my head at them in goodbye, and run into the ballroom, trying to gather my thoughts as I weave through the guests. I pass Astoria as Mother catches my eye, stepping up to the platform.

"Astoria, could you grab Blaise for me?"

She nods and glides away.

I turn to Mother as they begin tapping their wands against their glasses.

"Did you have enough time?" Mother whispers, smiling at her enemies.

"I don't know."

She nods, pressing her lips together, and steps onstage, graciously accepting her applause.

What would have happened if Blaise hadn't found us? My fingers would have wandered, skipping over her ribs, dipping down her spine. She would have leaned into me? Let me touch her?

And suddenly Mother is introducing me and I'm Draco Malfoy again, only not. I smirk. I wave. I make jokes and nod at Harry Potter in solidarity. I find a way to throw off the fourteen months I spent in a damp cell, doing more damage to myself than Dementors ever could.

And I see her, glowing white against the marble in the back of the room, her eyes deeper than the sea of black fabric between us.

"We at Malfoy Consulting Group want to create the law. To change the world." She hears the echo, and I see her chest move deeply. "And if like me, you find your cubicle becoming too small for you…" I look at the rest of them, pretending with a smile that any of this - this whole night- is for their benefit. "… We're hiring."

A chuckle through the room. I check my timepiece. I've done it. Just over ten seconds to spare.

I count down. The room joins me. And I look back at her, hoping she heard me. Hoping she understands.

Thinking. Always thinking.

Fireworks and cheers and clinking glasses, and I toast her. She drinks her champagne and holds me under her spell.

Someone hugs me. Blaise tried to kiss me. A new client shakes my hand. And I can't find her. She whispers through the crowd, haunting the room for the next hour. Every time I find her she slips away, smiling with Potter and Ginny Weasley.

By the end of the night, when Blaise is the only one on the dance floor, I realize it wasn't enough.

I say goodnight, thanking the staff, complimenting Mother, letting Blaise know where the Hangover Potions are.

Perhaps I scared her. Perhaps she scared herself.

I climb the stairs, passing several doors I know not to open.

Maybe she saw through me. Saw that it was all for her. Maybe whatever Father said to her about me still eats at her.

The way she bolted from this room at the mere suggestion of marrying you.

I pace my room, slowly taking off my suit.

What do I do now? How do I salvage this? Do I double down? Go to Cornerstone tomorrow?

I stare at my carpets, tracing the patterns and try to think big picture, try to think of the business first.

There's a pounding in my head, possibly the champagne, possibly the stress, tapping at my skull, scratching behind my eyes.

What do I do now?

The tapping is outside of me. My window. An owl scratches the pane.

I jump to it, and he swoops, dropping a thin envelope. I rip the seal and find just her name. And her "title."

The only resume I ever asked her for.

I'm in my socks and trunks, running to my study, passing stray guests to find the paperwork I drew up for tomorrow's influx of applications. A special folder - one that I hoped I would open - for the Senior Consultant, Non-Wizard Relations.

I scribble a cover letter, calling her the Golden Girl again, and send it all off with my owl.

I'm leaving my study, eyes glazed, trying to recover, and Mother turns down the hall, pulling her earrings out.

She stares at me, half-naked and half-drunk.

"Well?" she says.

I feel my lips turn, pulling up and away and I blink a few times before I realize I'm laughing, giddy with it all.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Sequel to "The Right Thing to Do" - Draco's POV. Part 2 of the "Rights and Wrongs" series.

Chapter Notes

I have risen.

Thanks to everyone who's sent me notes or messages of encouragement. Thank you for understanding that there are sometimes other commitments I have to deal with, including my own health.

Also, the cool thing about this chapter is that it begins the final section of the TRTTD story, which also means that I'm running out of time to tell you all the flashbacks and memories that are important not only here, but also to the Auction AU... coming to a ff site near you in early 2019... :) So be on the lookout for details that might pop up in the alternate universe...

And a reminder that this story is more explicit than TRTTD, for Death Eater scenes and being inside a teenage boy's mind. So you've been warned. Shouldn't really be any triggers here if you've read this far.

Monday, January 3, 2000

"And over here, Mr. Malfoy," the shopkeeper says, gesturing for me to follow, "we have an exquisite Birchwood set—"

"No," I say. "Something darker." I don't bother following him back. "What house were you in?"

"Hufflepuff, sir."

I roll my eyes at the curtain displays. "Did you ever sneak your way into Gryffindor Tower?"

"Er, no, sir."

Me, neither.

"I want something welcoming, something warm. Something very Gryffindor."

"What about Cherrywood, sir?"

My eyes flick over to the corner where he's pointing. A deep, dark, red-tinted cabinet stares back at me.

"We could match with reds and golds," he offers. "I have carpets to complement—"

"Send me a design."

~*~

Tuesday, January 4, 2000

"So, now that I'm leaving the Dragon Sanctuary, I'll be looking for more of an office job. My wife heard about your shindig on Friday night – had a friend that was there – and told me you'll be having a Magical Creatures division, or something of that sort. So, I mailed in my resume.

"I must admit, I don't know much about the position Mr. Malfoy. I just know that my wife wants me away from the flames, but maybe Malfoy Consulting could keep me close to the creatures."

He grins big.

Talkative.

Well, I did say "tell me about yourself."

"Isn't there a Weasley that works at the Sanctuary?" I say.

He lifts his brows. "Yes! Charlie and I are great friends. Are you acquainted with him?"

"No."

"Oh."

"But Miss Granger is. She'd probably love to… talk about him." I wave my hand, trying to brush the Weasleys away.

His eyes go round. "*Hermione* Granger?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

"Is that a problem?"

"Oh! No! My wife is… a huge fan."

Well, we should all double-date sometime. I try not to roll my eyes. I kind of hate him. But she'll love him.

"Well, Walter, the position is the Associate under the Senior Consultant for Non-Wizard Relations. This could mean taking cases on dragons and other magical creatures, but really it is an assistant to the Senior Consultant, watching her mail, responding to her messages, proofing her reports…" And the idea that she even *needs* a person to do this for her is ridiculous but everyone else gets an Associate, so… "First day is Monday the seventeenth. Salary for the position is 20,000 galleons a year…"

I let my voice drone on, listing the benefits. His eyes widen every so often in a way he thinks he's hiding.

~*~

Friday, January 7, 2000

The office space is shaping up nicely. My furniture arrived today, and Granger's arrived yesterday. The shopkeeper did a wonderful job on the design of her space, so I hired him to do the entire floor, paying double if he could get the furniture delivered by this Monday.

I gave Mother a walk-through last night. She spent quite a bit of time in Granger's office, placing the drapes and adding a few plants.

And for the first time all week, I have nothing to do.

I'm sitting at my desk, running my fingers over the obsidian stone, trying to think of what else needs to be done before people start dropping in. I'm waiting for the response on two letters. One to Granger to figure out what day next week works for everyone to come to the office, and one to my father to have him approve the Love Contract.

He sent me a note on Saturday morning, asking how it went. I sent him a detailed report of the evening – the food, the orchestra, the press – and in the last line I included the names of the people who'd joined.

I'd just decided to organize my paperwork for the third time when I hear the click-clacking of designer heels cutting sharply across the office floor. I give myself one guess as to who it is before my door swings open without so much as a knock and Pansy is there, hands proudly on her hips.

"Hello, Pans." I turn back to the contract I'm reviewing again.

"I want Granger," she says.

What a coincidence. So do I.

I look up at her with a bored expression.

"For what kind of torture?"

"For my fashion line." She sends me a blazing smile.

I blink at her, and straighten in my chair. "Granger... doesn't *do* fashion."

"Which is why she'll be perfect." Pansy takes the chair in front of me, dipping into a comfortable position with legs crossed. "I can mold her into what I need."

She waves a hand and a portfolio book appears in front of me, over my paperwork. I sigh and flip open the cover.

Parkinson
The Modern Business Witch

"What's this?"

"My new fashion line." She folds her hands in her lap and waits for me to flip through.

I don't.

"Alright," I say. I close the portfolio. "You can write to her and make the proposal—"

"Orrr..." She grins. "You can schedule the meeting. I doubt she'd meet with me just from a letter." She flips her hair over her shoulder. "I know the *Prophet* will be doing a write up next week – probably front page. I want to dress her for the shoot."

I sigh. "Well, that's easy enough—"

"And I want a contract with her. All public appearances. Monday through Friday apparel."

I laugh. She maintains her easy grin.

"And how in Merlin's name do you think you'll be able to con her into that?" I chuckle.

"I can be very persuasive." She lifts a brow at me.

"I remember." I lift one back.

Something softens in her eyes, something that's been flinty and sharp for several years now. She winks at me and it's gone.

"She's going to be the most discussed witch in wizarding Britain. She's going to be tearing the Wizengamot a new asshole on a daily basis, photographed, interviewed, appearing at galas and Ministry functions." Pansy tilts her head. "I want to be there."

I nod. "I just don't think she'll want all of that."

Pansy smiles. "That's why you need to set up the meeting, indicate that at least for the *Prophet*, this is the route."

I open my mouth to argue, to tell her I have no power over her, to suggest a different approach. She cuts me off with the one thing that could silence me.

"I think you owe me. When it comes to her."

I look up at her blue eyes. Still warm. But insistent. And if I'd ever studied Legilimency, I feel like I could find something else under that warmth.

~*~

Saturday, October 12, 1996

They tell me Katie Bell is in the hospital wing. She's being transferred tomorrow to St. Mungo's.

I tuck that away, ignoring the gossip, ignoring the empty feeling in my chest. I focus on a solid line in front of my eyes.

Bella taught me a different technique for Occlumency. It's rudimentary. I know why Severus looks down upon it. It's strong, but basic. No finesse.

And it's only built for the mind. Severus's technique is built for much more.

But Bella's walls are easier. And so, they've been up for weeks, while I ignore Severus's summons to his office. I'd seen him the first week back from term, trying to start our training again, but all he wanted to talk about were my plans for my mission.

If he wanted the Headmaster dead that badly, why doesn't he just kill him himself.

"Did you hear about Bell?"

I blink, and Pansy is dropping onto the couch next to me. I knew I should have chosen the wingback chair instead.

"Yes. Who's got it out for her, I wonder?" I say, closing my book, hopefully giving the hint that this conversation will be short.

"Gryffindors," Pansy huffs. "Probably got in the way somehow."

I swallow, and send a dead stare to her as she plays with the cuff of my sleeve.

"Draco," she continues softly, "are you eating?"

I want to pull my arm away. Pull my skin away.

"Of course. Why do you ask?"

"Because you're not eating." She lifts a brow at me.

I shift. "The slop the elves call 'food' here doesn't always appease my appetite." I trace my fingers over her wrist so she can't say I won't touch her, and I move to stand.

"Is it your mission?"

I stop, awkwardly halfway between sitting up and standing, and glance around the common room. It's empty.

"Watch it, Pansy."

"The room is clear. I already checked," she says. "I just want you to know that you can talk to me. No details. Just your feelings."

I laugh. It's harsh against the stone walls, and I bite back the sound. I look to her and her expression turns to a scowl. If she only knew. It would be safer for me to talk about my assassination attempts than to talk about my *feelings*.

This is where Bella's Occlumency fails. I wouldn't have laughed if I had meditated this morning. If I had packed my feelings away.

Pansy swallows and frowns at her fingernails.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I don't think there's anything I can talk about."

She looks up at me, through long, dark lashes and says, "I want to help you."

I have a fleeting moment where I wonder what she would do if I asked her to Avada Albus Dumbledore for me… and then I vow to meditate tomorrow morning. Refocus.

"There's nothing you can do," I say.

I cup her cheek with my palm, and before I can stand and say goodnight, she holds my wrist, tangling our fingers, and says, "I can think of something. To help."

She trails her hand down my arm. Her other hand touches my thigh, moving slow circles. I look up at her and her eyes are dark.

I don't have the energy for this.

"Not here, Pans—"

"I've locked out any stragglers," she says, triumph in her eyes. "And kicked out everyone who was down here earlier."

I look around and realize that yes, there were several other people down here half an hour ago. I run through a few other excuses, but she's twisting, throwing her leg over my hips, cupping my face and kissing me.

A sixteen-year-old boy who doesn't want to have sex with a willing witch. What would the gossips say then.

She nips at my lips, slides her tongue into my mouth, rolls her hips. All the things I like.

She pulls back to breathe and I say, "I don't mean to disappoint you, love, but I may be too tired for this."

She pauses, her fingers on my shirt buttons. I've botched it. She's going to tell everyone that I'm gay or that I'm cheating on her. We're going to argue and she's going to break up with me.

She looks into my eyes, and I'm wondering if I can fake a dizzy spell and pass out. After all, I haven't eaten since dinner last night.

"Just relax then," she whispers. The look she gives me is *sinful* and I'm so glad we aren't going to spend the next half hour fighting that I kiss her back when she presses her lips to mine again.

She moves to my neck, kissing my jaw, my pulse, unbuttoning my shirt, hands sliding across my ribs. I keep my hands on her waist. It feels nice, but there's still not a lot happening in my trousers, and when I realize that's her next destination, I run my hands up to her chest, trying to find some inspiration.

Push-up bra. The damn thing has no give to it. Her fingers are at my waist now, and I try to figure out how to tell her I'm not in the mood again before she can feel it for herself.

Maybe I'll just tell her about my mission. That seems easier than explaining this.

She doesn't even bat an eye when she presses against my crotch and finds nothing to work with. I can feel a blush spreading up my chest, but her fingers continue to unbutton my trousers. She leans into my ear and whispers, "Relax, Draco. Close your eyes."

I swallow, and she kisses my throat. I close my eyes, and lean my head on the back of the couch. She slides down my body, kissing my chest on the way down, and I purse my lips together when I realize she's going to try to suck me off when I'm not even half-hard yet.

Her hand wraps around me and I feel her climb onto the floor between my knees.

This is going to be arduous. So, I press my eyes tight and try. I think of last year, when she did this for the first time and I only lasted three minutes between her lips. I think of the time she and I shared a hot tub together in Italy this summer, before everything started getting more complicated and before the ink sank into the skin of my arm. Her body had glistened with the water and the moonlight, and she'd straddled me in the tub, her face next to mine, and I'd closed my eyes when she lowered herself onto me, and I'd thought of a different pair of thighs—

I take a deep breath. Pansy rubs my hip, and I realize her mouth is already on me. I'm getting harder at least.

This will be over soon, and maybe I'll even sleep tonight.

Yes, this could be helpful. I think of sleep. I think of lying in my bed for the past few months, staring at the ceiling. Only a few nights did I reach below my pajamas and find release. I feel my cock slipping into her mouth again, and I think of the last time I'd properly made a mess of my sheets. I'd slept so well that night.

I had tucked everything away in my mind and focused only on things that made me hard. Things that heated me. I'd thought of *her*, of course. Thought of her hands around my shoulders, thought of her seated in my lap, moaning against my ear. Thought of what her face would look like as she came, thought of how quickly I could get her to peak and then how I would take my time with her for the next few hours. Thought of her breasts against my lips as I traveled down her body, pressing her legs open and holding her hips still as I tried my mouth on her, as I tasted her and sucked at her until she screamed for me to let her come—

Pansy starts bobbing her head on me, and I open my eyes to the ceiling to realize I'm fully hard, and she must think that I like what she's doing.

I may throw up later.

But the thought of losing my erection now… Pansy would never forgive me.

I look down at her, finding her light eyes watching my face, her lips pulled tight around my cock as it slips through her mouth. I run my fingers through her thin strands in thanks, and she sucks me hard.

I guess that's nice.

Her lips pop off me, and she takes a deep breath. "Relax, Draco." Raspy. I remember the first time I heard her talk after having my cock in her mouth. I had fucked her immediately.

I close my eyes again as she licks at me. Just get through this.

I slip into her mouth again, and I imagine *her* mouth. I gasp.

Pansy does again… whatever she did.

It's *her* lips around the head of my cock, and I can watch as I slip into *her* mouth. She bats her eyes prettily up at me, asking if I like what she's doing.

"Yes," I whisper into the void.

Pansy hums around me.

Only it's *her* voice, cut off by my cock. *Her* voice struggling to tell me the correct answer to the equations and *her* consonants clicking around the correct way to store a Grindylow, and *her* teeth peppering her words with pearls as she tells me how to fuck her.

A hand at the base of me, and it's *hers* with her short nails and firm grip like I'm a quill and she's ready for the exam.

Hair tickles my thigh as a tongue slips down, down, taking all of me to the back of a throat. It's *her* curls dancing around her face.

Her hair, sweeping back from *her* face as I reach for it.

Her throat moving around me, begging me to come.

Her breath on me.

Hermione.

I shout, gagging on my voice, and I come down *her* throat as she swallows every drop, like I'm precious to her. Like she wants me to make love to her mouth every day.

A wet *pop.*

I'm boneless on the bed.

Couch.

It's a couch in the common room.

My eyes snap open to the ceiling, the ghost of a whisper bounces around the walls, like a kite you can't catch in the wind.

My lungs heave for air, and I feel Pansy at my feet.

I hear her cast a teeth-cleansing charm.

I feel her body against my calf, tense.

And I don't know if I've actually said it. Don't know what happened outside of my mind in the past ten minutes.

My heart is thundering, and it's painful in my chest, like it wants out.

Then Pansy is tucking me away, buttoning me up. She buttons my shirt too. When she gets to the top, I tilt my head up to face her.

There's a tension in her face, but she's smiling at me.

"Better?"

I nod. I kiss her.

And I blame Bella and her worthless tricks. I meditate that night, finding a box I hadn't truly used for several weeks now.

~*~

Wednesday, January 12, 2000

A memo flies under my door and lands on my desk. From Dorothea.

Mr. Wentworth and Miss Granger have arrived.

I plant my hands on my desk, stopping myself from heading to her office. I wanted to see her reaction to her furniture, but I didn't want to be waiting for her, too eager…

So I sit. I hear Wentworth opening his office door, starting to organize a few things.

I sit for five minutes. Watching the clock. I count down the second hand and stand as it hits the 12. I button my robes, and head out of my office. Something catches my eye before I've gone too far.

Blaise's name plate is gone. I frown. I scan the doors, finding him standing in Granger's doorway. Just to the left, in the empty office, I see a few of Blaise's belongings, and his name plate on the door.

I sigh. I check in on Wentworth, shake his hand, offer him some tea.

I make my way around, stopping smile at Dorothea.

And finally, I head to Blaise.

"Blaise."

He turns with a saucy look in his eyes. "My liege." He fucking bows.

"When you are assigned an office, I expect you to stay in it." I purposefully cannot see Granger from my position in the doorway.

Blaise sends me a smirk, the one that tells me he knows exactly what he's doing. "But I much prefer the view on this side of the building."

"As Senior Consultant on Marketing and P.R., I need you closer to me. Clear out of that office."

"Yes, Mr. Malfoy." He salutes me. Winks at her. And leaves.

I watch him head into the vacant office, smirking.

I turn on my heel to stomp away, but I haven't said anything to her yet. I twist back around, poke my head through the door to find her seated at her desk, staring at her bookshelves.

"Evening, Granger." My voice croaks.

"Oh, yes, hi."

I step away, wondering if I should have said more. Asked how she liked her office. Asked how her day was. Asked if she was happy.

I shake my head and roll my shoulders, heading back to my office to scowl at my desk for the next hour or so.

~*~

Monday, January 17, 2000

I've had about five Howlers per day since Skeeter printed that Granger would be joining me.

Dorothea, Melody, and Carrie have all offered to review them for me when they come in so I don't have to, but I don't want anything incriminating slipping out.

After the third one this morning, I realize that maybe I need the torture to remind myself that she's not mine.

"*—FILTHY FAMILY OF YOURS AWAY FROM MISS GRANGER. SHE'S WORKED SO HARD TO BE A SOURCE OF GOOD IN THIS WORLD. I DON'T KNOW WHAT DIRT YOU HAVE ON HER THAT CONNED HER INTO JOINING YOUR TEAM, BUT I WILL MAKE IT MY LIFE'S MISSION TO PROTECT THAT GIRL."*

I half expect it to be signed M. McGonagall.

That's the last of them. I stand from my desk, ready to make the rounds. It's still a few hours before most will be coming in, but I've been here since six, anxious.

Melody, bless her, arrived forty-five minutes early simply because "the first day is sooo important!" She's been sending me a memo every time someone walks in the door.

I grab up Quentin Margolis's letter, so I have some kind of excuse for checking on Granger. I chat with Carrie, I check on Mockridge.

I knock on her doorframe. "Granger."

I brace myself to take her in, and find Blaise. Sitting on her desk. Her Cherrywood desk that cost almost 500 galleons. He smiles at me.

I look to her. She's placing books on her shelves. They're so comfortable.

"Quentin Margolis wants to schedule a meeting with us next week. I'll make myself available whenever, so please respond and let me know." She takes the letter from me, and I turn Blaise as she reads it. "Blaise, are you prepared for your meeting with Dogberd this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Brilliant. Gather your notes and I'll meet you in my office in five minutes." Get the fuck out of here.

Blaise feigns heartache and asks, "Mr. Malfoy, you don't trust me?"

I answer several meanings of the question when I say, "No."

He laughs and bids her goodbye. I wait until he's completely gone before turning back to her.

Alone now.

She starts placing books on her shelves, asking me about Blaise's meeting. I take the opportunity to move closer.

She points to where Blaise just left. "Is he any good? Does he have any idea what he's doing?"

I smirk, part of me pleased that she sees right through him. Even though *of course* she would."Unfortunately, he's the best."

"Glad to hear he's worth the effort," she says.

She looks at me as she places books on her shelf. And it's almost domestic, the way she's setting up a home, nesting. And the way I stand taking her in.

"You like your office?"

She turns to face me. "I love it." And I can see she means it.

Do you tip office decorators?

"Good."

Her eyes flutter for a moment, and I can pretend that it will be this easy. That I'll be able to just stare at her like this forever. That she'll let me.

She's the first to look away. She grabs more items from the box on her desk, and I can hear her asking me something, but my eyes are stuck on a piece of paper.

Office Relationship Disclosure.

I blink at Blaise's name. And the space for someone else to sign. And I can't figure out what this piece of paper is doing in here, on her desk, until I *do* figure it out and I stare at it a moment longer, brain catching up.

She'd asked about the meeting.

"Er, yes. Just a meet-and-greet, really." I pull at my buttons, feeling too tight, and say, "See you at nine."

I walk back to my office.

Blaise is laying on my couch, his notes on his chest.

"So, Dogberd is going to want a sort of Do Not Compete Agreement," he says. "He doesn't want us representing other teams that compete against them, but I'm going to argue for a Non-Compete in the British and Irish League only."

I listen. I turn to my desk. He goes on, rattling off his suggestions and notes. I watch him as he talks. His long fingers, and full lips.

I crack my neck.

"—might be a bit of a deal-breaker, but I'm going to broker that when we get there…"

I run through the Love Contract in my head. I didn't think of Blaise. I didn't think he'd…

I thought he knew.

"—full run-around—"

I thought he understood how it would break me.

"Draco?"

I look up from the floor. He's sat up at some point.

"Draco?"

"Do you want her?"

This is stupid. This is pointless and obnoxious, and nothing to focus on today of all days.

He blinks at me. "Who?"

My eyes narrow at him, and black spots pop at the edge of my vision. "Granger."

He chuckles. "Who doesn't?"

I turn. I pace back to my desk. My buttons are too tight.

I can deal with this. It is unexpected, but not improbable.

"Draco?"

The worst that can happen is watching the two of them greet each other in the mornings. His hand on her waist as he hands her coffee. He'll need to know how to make it right for her. I guess I can tell him how –

"What's wrong?"

If they show affection in the office, I can have Hartford take care of that. No PDA allowed in the workspace and all that. I would just have to approve their time off for vacations, knowing the days would be spent together.

"Draco, I didn't mean—"

Unless it's less than that. Unless it's only a matter of him sliding inside of her first. Listening to her moan.

A hand on my shoulder, and I spin, shoving him away from me. He stumbles back, knocking into the wall, and I can't see anything. The spots…

I blink and it clears, wet on my cheeks.

He's staring at me, eyes wide, hands up. "It was a joke, Draco. I'm not pursuing her."

I can't understand the words fully, too focused on why I'm *fucking crying* and I push my hands into my eyes.

"It was a joke." His hands on my shoulders again and I don't want them there. "You *have* to see how much she wants you, Draco."

I breathe a shuddering breath. "This is fucking stupid," I mutter into my hands.

"I thought things were settled between you," he says. "On the balcony, it looked like…"

"It fucking could have been, but my nutter of a best friend interrupted us thirty seconds too soon."

He chuckles. "If you missed your speech, you wouldn't have been able to eye-fuck her from across the room."

I bark a laugh. I finish wiping my face. He steps back.

"You don't have to worry about me," he says, and I can't meet his eyes so I'm staring at his waistcoat buttons. "But I do intend on shagging the shit out of Melody, so you're going to need to lighten up on this whole 'Love Contract' thing."

I frown at him. He smirks. I say, "Daphne wants you back. You could always focus on that."

His smile fades and he says, "Not all of us can wait as patiently as you."

I feel my breath coming back. I conjure a mirror and see that my face is still splotchy. Fucking stupid. My hand shakes when I vanish the mirror.

"I thought you were more prepared for today," he says. "Thought you were ready."

I stare at my desk. "Me too."

"Do you need me to try it?"

I lift a brow at him. "Have you improved in the past two years?"

"Probably not."

I shake out my shoulders, and turn to face him. I concentrate on a series of bricks while he pulls his wand.

"*Legilimens*."

I don't know how long he spends pushing at me. But eventually he pulls away, sweat on his brow.

"It's cold in there," he says.

I nod. "Good."

He frowns.

We head to the conference room. She walks in with Walter just before the meeting starts and I try not to watch her as she tries to find her seat.

I welcome everyone. I ask them to introduce herself and I smile as she stands, giving a speech. She blushes when she realizes no one else is introducing themselves with a monologue, and I grin at her until Blaise kicks me under the table.

I run the Senior Consultant meeting, explaining the financials without looking at her, answering Mockridge's questions without focusing on her fidgeting hands.

I mention the *Prophet*, remember my part to play in Pansy's charade, and when the meeting is over I carry her back to her office, telling her there's a 10AM waiting for her.

She jumps into action, asking questions, demanding explanations.

"Calm down, Granger," I say. "It's just a preliminary appointment."

I open the door and watch as she freezes up when Pansy walks to her. I give Pansy a look that says, "please don't kill her," and shut the door.

When I get back to my office, I have five more Howlers. I run my hands down my face, silence the room, and sit.

I open the first one.

"*DRACO MALFOY IS A GOD AMONG MEN. HE'S GOT HAIR LIKE ADONIS."*

Blaise's screeching voice assaults my ears. I stare at the red envelope as it dissolves into ashes.

I open the next.

"*DRACO MALFOY IS THE ONLY MAN I'D TURN GAY FOR*."

I rub my face and open the next.

"*I LIKE HIS HANDS.*"

~*~

Monday, October 13, 1997

Walking the Hogwarts corridors is a different experience now. I don't need Crabbe and Goyle behind me to encourage the first years to move out of my way anymore. I am the young Death Eater. Complicit in the murder of Albus Dumbledore.

But, the corridors don't feel the same. The whispers aren't the type I want to hear. And there's a light gone out for everyone since Potter did not return. And for me, since she did not.

I'm rounding the corner, heading back to the Slytherin dormitories when I hear: "Mr. Malfoy! Perfect timing!"

I stop, take a deep breath, set my features, and turn to see Amycus Carrow smirking at me.

"Professor Carrow." I tuck my hands behind my back when I feel them shake. "I apologize, I'm awfully close to curfew."

He waves a hand. "Oh, not to worry. You're in need, actually."

He gestures for me to follow. I duck into the Dark Arts classroom after him, and find Neville Longbottom, Hannah Abbott, and Luna Lovegood across the room, wandless. To my right, Blaise stands with Harper and Astoria Greengrass.

Longbottom sneers. He's got a black eye that never seems to go away. Blaise shifts and looks away from me. He's not been as friendly since before. Before he saw the Mark on my arm.

"Hello, Draco," Lovegood says, like she's hosting tea.

"We're having a little after-hours tutoring," Amycus says, teeth gleaming. "These three"—he points at Longbottom, Abbott, and Lovegood—"were found wandering too close to curfew. And as you know, Longbottom and Lovegood attempted to break into the Headmaster's office last week—"

"We completed our detentions for that already," Longbottom snarls. "Snape sent us into the forest—"

"*Silencio*."

Longbottom's voice disappears. I feel the silence in my bones.

"So," Amycus continues, "Mr. Zabini, Miss Greengrass, and Mr. Harper are assisting me with detention while reviewing this week's lesson. They were all unsuccessful in their practice on the spider in class."

The Cruciatus Curse.

My eyes flip to my Slytherins. Astoria's bottom lip trembles.

"You, on the other hand…" Amycus paces the room in wide circles. "You showed quite a bit of promise in class yesterday, Mr. Malfoy."

I let my eyes drift along the walls, hoping…

There, a portrait of a milkmaid stopping by a creek. She wipes sweat from her brow and looks over at me. I hold her eyes and she nods once, before setting down her pails and walking down stream, out of the portrait.

"My aunt has been teaching me," I reply in a lazy way. I think of the mice in our dungeons, the way they screamed and squeaked. The house elf, Boppy, who always let me sneak out at

night when I was young – the way he cried for himself. And then Rowle. Who I wish I could do again.

I blink, clear my mind, and look over at the three detainees. Lovegood is staring at the picture of the milkmaid, turning her eyes on me with a pleasant smile.

"Perhaps you could give a demonstration."

I look to Carrow. He's teeth glint from between his lips.

"Of course, Professor."

I draw my wand, turning to Longbottom first. The history makes it easy. I focus on the end of my wand, the dark smoke twisting inside of me.

"*Crucio*."

He crumples. The silencing charm is a blessing. But his mouth is open wide.

I release him. He pants on the floor.

I turn to Carrow. "What's so difficult about that?"

He cackles. Astoria looks faint.

Carrow gestures to the other two. Hannah Abbott is next. I hardly know her. Too quiet in class, and never caught anyone's interest. She screams. I see Blaise turn away from the corner of my eye.

There's an acid eating my insides, rotting through me. It makes its way up my throat, heading for my mind where I lock it all away.

I release Abbott, and she shakes, moaning.

I turn to Lovegood. She smiles at me. My hand shakes, and before Carrow sees, I flick my wrist, silencing Abbott. Like it's what I meant to do.

I crack my neck, feeling emptied. I raise my wand to Lovegood. I focus on the tip, smoking from electricity.

Her pale eyes shine back. And I wonder why she isn't afraid.

"It's alright, Draco."

I blink. Lovegood said it. Like giving me permission. Like I asked.

The door opens with a *smack* and Severus is barreling in. He takes one look around the room, and I see the milkmaid resettle at her stream.

"Professor Carrow," Severus hisses. "Whatever do we have going on here?"

"Detention, Headmaster." Carrow grins, like he's about to be given a treat. "Caught these three wandering at curfew. Thought we'd give the others some practice at the Cruciatus Curse."

Severus raises a brow. "A bit extreme for curfew, don't you think, Professor? Whatever will we do to them when they commit a more serious offense?"

Carrow laughs. Like he and Severus have a private joke.

Severus glances at the room. "To bed."

Luna helps Hannah off the ground. Harper runs out the door. Blaise squeezes Astoria's hand. I stay. I know I stay.

"Professor Carrow, please escort Mr. Longbottom and Miss Lovegood back to their towers. Miss Greengrass, please ensure Miss Abbott goes straight to her dormitories. Mr. Zabini. Please stay."

Blaise frowns at Snape. Carrow drags Longbottom up by the collar and takes him out. I see Astoria throw Hannah's arm over her shoulder as soon as they're out the door, out of view.

The door shuts. Blaise scowls at me. Like I've electrocuted him too. He's stopped asking me questions about the Dark Lord after Dumbledore died. Stopped envying me.

I feel a cauldron bubbling inside of me. A foul potion, thick and viscous. I can hear Abbott screaming still. And maybe I do know her. Maybe she and I were partners in Charms class for third year. I think she gave me a Valentine that year.

Severus is talking to Blaise. I turn away, heave, and the acid pours out of me, splashing on the stone floors, spitting and swirling until I can't breathe with it. I gasp in air, gurgling.

Severus's hand on my shoulder. He vanishes my sick. He's speaking to me lowly. So low I can't hear over my air, over the screaming. I think I can hear Longbottom screaming too now.

I heave again, on my knees now. Once it's out of me I'm jerked upright, and Severus holds my face, sinking deep into my mind, viewing the memory, physically *pushing* it away.

It shrinks back.

For good measure, he searches for her. He finds a jewelry box and rattles it, but all that falls out are a few shallow thoughts, like trinkets.

He leaves my mind, releasing me, and I stumble when his hands are no longer on my face.

He conjures a glass of water and I drink it all, sloshing down my chin.

"Mr. Zabini," Severus says. I forgot Blaise was there. And now he's seen. "Escort Mr. Malfoy back to the dungeons."

Severus sweeps from the room. When I can finally meet Blaise's gaze, he's ashen, eyes wet. His arms are crossed over his chest protectively.

"What was that? That thing he did?"

I blink at him, vision doubling. "Who?"

"Snape. When he… You were sick and he healed you."

I frown at him. "He didn't *heal* me. It was Legilimency." And then I add, "I'm an Occlumens." Like it explains anything.

"Since when?" he hisses.

I stare at him, trying to figure out if there's any danger in him knowing. "Fifth year. He's been training me."

Blaise studies me, like I just told him I'm a werewolf.

He holds the door open for me and we head back. He hands me a slab of chocolate after the second time we stop to rest. Like me, he doesn't have a Patronus to keep the Dementors from haunting him.

I listen to our footsteps and wonder why Severus had him hang back. Did he have something to attend to, making him unable to walk me himself?

When we arrive at the common room, all eyes turn on us. Harper is talking quickly with Daphne and Pansy. They quiet.

"Is it true?" Vincent lumbers toward us, a gleam in is his eye. "You Crucio'd another student?" He grins. He's the only one besides me who could curse the spider on the first try yesterday in class.

"Yeah, you wanna see?" I snark at him. He pulls back from me.

Daphne stomps over to us. "Where is Astoria?" she demands.

"She should be along—" Blaise tries.

Daphne pushes me. "You stay away from her, Draco. I don't want her learning anything from you. No more *tutoring*—"

Blaise steps into her, pressing his hand against her hip "That's not how it happened—"

She pushes me again, and I keep my mind centered on getting to bed. "Harper says you can do it without *blinking*. Says it comes natural to you." She heaves in air, and I watch as Pansy stands in the corner, looking away. "Astoria's not like you, Draco. You're sick. Been hanging out with your Death Eater pals too long and now you're just like them—"

"Back the fuck off!" Blaise snarls. I watch as he shoves his girlfriend back, and guides me to the stairs, down into the dormitories, his hand on my shoulder.

He shuts the door. I take off my shoes, starting to dress for bed.

"Are you alright?"

I turn and he's watching me.

He's expecting me to be angry. To feel betrayed. Feel upset. Feel anything.

"Sure."

I take a cold shower. All my showers are cold. When I return to my four-poster, Blaise has brought up some leftovers from dinner. He sits with me on my bed as I pick at the food.

"Who are you hiding secrets from?" he asks once I've had enough.

I look up at him. He's too close to it all. He already knows, if my suspicions have been right over the past three years, but who knows where he'll end up once the war starts.

"You," I say. "I started having erotic dreams about you in third year. Snape's been helping me control my urges." I lift my brow at him.

He grins. "I knew it."

He winks at me.

And as he flips open a Quidditch catalogue with me, talking about the Irish this year, I realize why Snape had him stay behind. For me.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year!

Tuesday, January 18, 2000

I barely get a second to myself on the day of the *Prophet* shoot. Inviting six different periodicals to the office to interview and photograph M.C.G. was… an ambitious idea. And Rita is now pouting that she's not the center of attention.

I've spent all morning in the conference room talking to different journalists about current projects, future expenditures, and then – abruptly – about Katya and Granger.

"Why Hermione Granger?" a sly auburn-headed witch asks, quill at the ready.

Love, I've been trying to answer that question for myself for years now…

"She's the best," I brag, lifting my brows at her. "I wanted the best."

She grins and says, "Her relationship with the Magical Creature community must have helped, yes?"

"Absolutely—"

"Mr. Malfoy," an older gentleman covering a business magazine cuts in. "What do you most look forward to in your relationship with Miss Granger?"

I blink at him.

The sex.

And before I can answer with those exact words, my assistant Carrie pokes her head into the conference room and says they're ready for us in my office. I jump up, grab my jacket, and lead the way.

There's a witch standing at my office window that could give Granger a run for her money. Long legs and dark curls.

It's the flare of her hips that finally clicks with me. And my throat is dry as I drink in the sunlight bouncing off of her neck and chest, the waistcoat clinging tight to her ribs, giving me a better idea of the lines and curves of her stomach, and the deep pools of her eyes that stare straight into me, digging into my mind and begging me to let her out of her box.

A bulb flashes, and she blinks.

I fix my collar and shake someone's hand. I let Daphne apply some kind of powder to my face. And I look back over at her.

Pansy's done this. She's done this for revenge.

She's put her in Slytherin green, something I will never forgive her for. And the angles of her cheekbones pop in the sunlight when she's got her hair pulled back like that. It makes her look harsher, older.

"Draco, darling." Rita is in front of me. "A few words for the *Prophet?*" The quill dances behind her head. I nod. "What drew you to Hermione Granger?"

The sex.

I clear my throat and ignore the figure near the window, speaking lowly.

"Er, what drew me to her was her mind. She's very… logical…" Ridiculous. "A true… asset."

Blaise appears over Rita's shoulder, smirking at me.

I glare at him.

"Asset. Yes," he says. Rita turns, opening the conversation up to us both. "And of all the *assets* she brings to the table," Blaise hums, "I'd say the most impressive…" He holds his hands in front of his chest like he's grabbing for an idea. Or like he's about to say her tits. "Her passion." He smiles at Rita. "She's as passionate as she is beautiful."

Rita's quill quivers.

"Well said, Mr. Zabini." Rita tucks a curl behind her ear, touching her neck in an obvious way. The woman needs a shag.

My eyes drift back to where Pansy is tugging at the arms of the green dress and Tracey is twisting a curl.

They've done something to her hair. Constrained it. I hate it.

"Well, I can say, Rita," Blaise continues jovially, "that Draco is truly looking forward to having Hermione Granger under him."

I close my eyes. Breathe deep.

"Not under." I smile. "I think of my Senior Staff as equals."

"Right you are," Blaise says. "I doubt a woman like Granger would stay in a position like that for long."

His eyes sparkle. I scowl. "Rita, darling. Shall we get started?"

She flutters away, placing everyone around my desk. Pansy floats to my elbow, straightening my cufflinks.

"*That* is the Modern Business Witch?" I whisper.

"Yes. She's beautiful and she knows it." Pansy smirks at me. "And so does everyone else."

I roll my shoulders back and take a breath. I need to turn away from the sight of Hermione Granger hopping up on my three thousand galleon desk and crossing her legs.

"Your mother would approve, I'd say." Pansy shrugs.

"Don't talk about my mother right now."

"Why not? I hear thinking about one's mother is the perfect way to squash unwanted thoughts."

I glare at her and she smiles back.

"Mr. Malfoy," Rita sings. "We'll have you in the chair now."

Rita takes me by the arm and sits me down, brushing my hair back more than necessary. When she walks back to the front of the room, I raise a brow at Tracey. She runs over and fixes whatever Skeeter did.

The pictures start. And all I can focus on is *not* letting my eyes drift to the left, where a lithe body is perched on shapely hips, leaning back on a small hand.

I *can't* get hard in the middle of this photoshoot. There is… no possible way.

When we pause and rearrange, I refocus. This is about the business. Selling the consulting group. We'll have a beautiful woman on the front page, because that's marketing. But any other stray thoughts about keeping her on this desk indefinitely, or leaning back in this chair as she crawls her way towards me, or slowing popping the buttons on her vest as she lays across the marble top—

A camera flashes.

Rita repositions us. She and Blaise are on either side of me. Then she has her sit once, knees turned in towards me, torso twisting towards the lens.

This is fucking torture.

At least the scent of her is covered with some foul hair product.

We're on the couch before I know it. It's just Blaise, her, and me. She leans behind me, breasts inches away from my ear, and I know if I turn to look at her I'll get an eyeful.

"Miss Granger? Lean down closer? Move your hand over there? Yes. That's right."

And I can feel the heat of her at my temple. I stare down the lens imagining the tunnels of Severus' eyes.

Then I'm watching Pansy and Rita position her around my office. Standing in front of Blaise and me. Reading a document. Standing next to my chair.

Belonging.

"You haven't said if you like the look yet." Pansy's at my side.

I press my lips together as they give her a book to hold, and then tell her to bend over my desk, green dress pulling tight against her backside.

"Lovely idea for the shoot Pans." I cross my arms in front of my chest, and try to discreetly cover my flushed throat with a hand on my chin. Perhaps I can physically push a moan back into my mouth if it slips out.

"She's agreed to three months."

My dry throat bobs. And Rita has her lean against the desk with her book, ankles crossing.

"And how'd you manage that?"

"I told you. I can be very persuasive."

"She's not cut out for your world, Pans," I say. "It's no offense to you, but she hasn't been trained for it. You spend three hours on her hair and makeup today and I promise you, tomorrow she'll arrive with today's hairstyle and a poor attempt at Daphne's contouring." I watch as they fix her hair, twisting a curl from her ponytail to lay flat on her chest. I press my thumb against my lips and mutter, "This isn't Hermione Granger."

Pansy is quiet for a moment as we watch her turn a page in the book, camera flashing.

"I think you underestimate her."

"Miss Granger!" Rita calls. "I am *adoring* this style on you. Who are you wearing?"

I watch as Granger's eyes meet Pansy's, a smirk tugging at her dark lips, and she lifts a perfectly arched brow.

"Parkinson." She grins. Like she's won a game of wizards' chess twelve moves before anyone will realize it.

And something thick twists inside my chest, dropping low, and swirling, licking at me.

She meets my eyes, still smirking. And I let myself have one moment to drink her in. From the arches of her feet in the delicate heels, up her ankles and curving around her calves, lingering on the knees I've longed to press open, imagining the shape of her thighs, swooping wide around her hips and dipping back in to her tight stomach, lifting toward her full chest and the swell of her skin there, and finally sliding up her clavicles to her long neck.

The camera flashes. And I blink it away.

~*~

Wednesday, January 19, 2000

She wears an orange dress. I never liked the color orange. But it's growing on me.

At least her hair is down again.

~*~

Friday, January 21, 2000

I'm relieved to find that she's in trousers today. Until I see how well they fit.

At lunch, I make excuses to Carrie and pop home for a cold shower. Only the temperature never turns all the way down. My hand leans against the stone tiles. The sway of her hips against my closed eyelids.

I'm ten minutes late to my 3 o'clock meeting.

~*~

Sunday, January 23, 2000

Mother wakes me up with the paper, going on and on about how *bloody gorgeous* – excuse my language, darling – Granger is in the *Prophet*, and how lovely Pansy's designs are, and would I like to invite Hermione over for dinner sometime to celebrate how smashing everything is going?

I stare blankly at the docile kitten in the paper, trying to reconcile her long legs and smooth curls with the ferocious girl in my dreams. Trying to wrap my head around this strange guilt, like I'm cheating on Hermione Granger every time this new version arouses me.

~*~

Monday, January 24, 2000

Ron Weasley sends me a Howler on Monday morning. And I have a complete mental break when I realize I'm agreeing with him.

"—HAS NO BUSINESS BEING PHOTOGRAPHED LIKE THAT. LIKE SOME MUGGLEBORN WHORE FOR YOU AND YOUR PURE-BLOOD FRIENDS—"

"Yes, yes. I know," I whisper, pacing the length of my office as the red envelope bellows from my desk.

"—SHE HAS A SOFT SPOT FOR YOU. ALWAYS HAS. AND WHILE I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO DESERVE IT—"

"Mm-hmm. I'm with you."

"—IT'S NO EXCUSE TO USE HER LIKE THIS. LIKE SHE'S NOTHING MORE THAN A PAIR OF LEGS—"

"Right. Because she's the Brightest Witch of Our Age—"

"—BRIGHTEST WITCH OF OUR AGE—"

"And for what purpose?!" I spin towards the letter as it screeches. "Why does she need to look like that to work here, eh?" I ask.

"—NOT EVEN SURE WHAT IT IS YOU'RE SELLING AT THAT COMPANY OF YOURS —"

"Yes! Yes!" I point at the Howler. "Exactly, Weasley! Exactly!"

"—BECAUSE IT SEEMS TO ME LIKE YOU'RE SELLING SEX."

I clap my hands. "Yes! Why are we marketing it like this? We're not even *selling* things, Weasley!"

"SHE IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WITCH IN THE ENTIRE WORLD, AND SHE WAS STILL THAT SAME WITCH TWO WEEKS AGO, BEFORE YOU AND PARKINSON GOT YOUR HANDS ON HER—"

"You know," I say, leaning back on the desk like me and the Howler are old chums. "I'm not a fan of the makeover either, if I'm honest, Weasley."

"IF I FIND OUT THAT *ANYTHING* UNTOWARD IS HAPPENING AT MALFOY CONSULTING GROUP, IF YOU'RE USING HER OR IF YOU HURT HER, I'LL MURDER YOU, MALFOY."

The Howler descends into flames. And I feel very alone in my office.

I open the other three waiting Howlers all at the same time, and just sit on my couch, listening to the din.

Just as I begin the 9AM meeting, Corban Hartford walks in late. I don't mind. And then she waves at him. And he smiles back. Like they're friends. Friendly.

I blink, tucking that away for later, and look at my notes again.

Later that afternoon, Blaise lets himself into my office, drops on the couch and says, "Where do you know Hartford from?"

I look up at him and he's got his eyes narrowed.

"He was an associate of my father's solicitor. He was fired for having too many morals."

"Hm," Blaise says. "Well, I've got my eye on him. Don't worry."

I almost ask, about what? But I remember this is Blaise. And he already knows. And if *I* saw Hartford smiling at her, then he already knows more.

~*~

Wednesday, January 26, 2000

We have the meeting with Margolis today, and I feel no more confident than I did last time. But At least I'll let Granger take the lead on it.

I swing by her office at noon, delighted to find Blaise elsewhere. Perhaps doing work.

"Ready?"

"Yes!" She's standing from her desk, capping her ink, and giving me her bright eyes.

In a cream skirt suit, hugging those hips. I look away before my eyes linger on her calves.

We share a lift downstairs with two of the interns headed to lunch, thankfully. It's not until the street that we're alone. We Disapparate and begin our walk through Muggle London.

The only reason Margolis would have chosen Muggle London as a meeting spot would be to throw me off. But I have her with me. And also, I swung by this shop on Monday, checking the menu, scoping the tables, examining the workers.

So… joke's on him.

"I've been meaning to ask you," she says, interrupting my judgment of the floppy-looking Muggle we just passed, "what happened to Tiberius Ogden?" The name shakes me. "I was very surprised to hear that the Wizengamot relations position was open."

"He declined." That's it. That's all there is.

I feel her eyes.

"Declined? But I thought things were going so well. I mean to say, from the way Noelle was talking about it," she says, and I focus on getting us to the café as quickly as possible. I guide her off the curb, resting my hand on her back for a moment longer than necessary.

She asks about the lunch Tiberius and I were supposed to have. I'd managed to block that entire family from my mind.

"He canceled. He said he had no interest in the company."

Finally to the café and I open the door for her, ending the conversation. Maybe I can guide her inside, let my hand rest low on her back again—

She stops in the doorway and turns to me. "Do you want me to write to him?"

I almost sneer at her and her philosophy that all problems could be fixed by a simple correspondence from the Golden Girl. But I catch myself as I remember how we got the meeting we're currently walking into.

"No, we'll find someone else, Granger."

She frowns, and I should have guessed that this would open a door in her mind.

"What about Noelle?" she says, and I flinch. "I think I hit it off with her. I could see when she's home next—"

"No." Merlin, if she wrote to Noelle… There would be a mess to untangle. That flighty bird would spin her own version of events and push Granger into a full investigation. I look directly into her eyes and say with an interesting imitation of my father, "Do *not* contact Noelle. Do you hear me, Granger?"

I watch as her eyes flick back and forth between each of mine. "Alright."

I fall into her deep brown pools for a moment longer and then retract, realign. Margolis is already here, even though we're ten minutes early. He's on the comfortable couches I saw on Monday with a man I don't recognize. I straighten my cuffs and lead her into the café.

Margolis actually shakes my hand this time – although my fingers may need to be reset – but his associate doesn't bother to stand. Mason, as he is introduced. I offer to order the drinks, and *Mason* decides to test me by ordering not one, but two entrees.

I nod, without comment, and head to the counter. I successfully handle the Muggle money and return to the table.

Granger jumps in. She has a presentation with her, which… I don't know why I doubted she would. I focus on my tea instead of her trim nails flipping through the pages, listening to her voice take lead, take dominance.

I catch myself staring at her jaw when Mason interrupts her, asking about the fundraising. I raise a brow at him. So, he's here to be difficult.

"And tell me, Hermione Granger," Mason says, and my eyes narrow at the way he slides over her name. "How much does it cost to get a court date with the Wizengamot?"

"I believe it is a ten galleon filing fee."

"Fundraising parties for ten galleons?" Mason sits back, sending me a satisfied smirk. "My, my. Your business must be further in the hole than I'd thought, Malfoy."

I examine him, letting my eyes drift to Margolis, who is looking elsewhere. We've lost. They weren't going to work with us, and nothing today would have changed that. There's no way Margolis would have brought a loose cannon to a business meeting.

I clear my throat and try to at least salvage my pride.

"The fundraising would cover the costs of research, the trip to the North Forest, the salaries of the staff working tirelessly, accommodations for the pack if they choose to come into London for the case—"

Mason cuts me off. He picks apart the proposal. I watch him as Granger handles him artfully. I pity her. She still doesn't know this is hopeless.

"I appreciate all you have done, Miss Granger, in preparing for this project," Margolis starts, "and all the work you plan to do for the werewolf community, but we will need to decline."

She's shocked into silence, and I listen to her throat squeak something while I keep my eyes on the two werewolves.

"It might be a bit easier for *you*, Miss Granger, having been in the spotlight all your life, but I don't believe in being bought out for publicity."

Easier for *her.* Like I've bought her. Something coils in my chest.

I feel her sputtering beside me, so I toss out one more useless statement so we can leave. "That's very unfortunate, Mr. Margolis. Is there anything we can do to change your mind?"

"Can you bring back Albus Dumbledore?" Mason smirks at me. And I wonder which would be faster, my wand arm or his jaws. He speaks again, "Or perhaps you can go back in time and put down Fenrir Greyback, instead of playing house with him for a year."

Playing house. Like when I would come downstairs to find him at our dining room table in my father's chair. Or when I found him sniffing at my mother when she swerved past him near the fireplaces.

Someone's talking. And it's a moment before I realize it's her.

"—no business with Fenrir Greyback that was not forced upon him—"

"I truly don't understand you, Hermione Granger," Mason cuts her off. "He fought against you in battle just two years ago and now you've thrown in your lot with him. The pay must be *excellent* at Malfoy Consulting Group."

It is. Thank you very much. I scratch my jaw and prepare to leave.

"If memory serves, Mason, you did not fight in my war," she hisses. "At least Malfoy had the decency to choose a side."

I feel a weight drop in my stomach. Simply picking a side isn't decency. I calm myself, tucking away memories of Muggle blueprints and marbles, bloody lettering and sprinklers.

Fireplaces and lightning currents. Strangled screaming. Crashed chandeliers.

None of that was *decent*. None of that was enough.

But here she was. Because it was the right thing. And as the thought crosses my mind, she says it aloud.

"…When I find myself in a position to be of assistance to undervalued people, I do everything I can to help. It's not publicity."

She's fuming, and I'm caught between how beautiful she is and how irritated I am.

"But it sure makes for an excellent photoshoot," Mason responds, then to me, "Doesn't it, Malfoy?" He announces grandly, "What a team. The pure-blood and the Mudblood."

I'm almost to my feet, almost at his throat, when Margolis announces that they are leaving, but then she's standing, snarking back at them, promising vengeance. She stomps out and I'm left with the scowling werewolves. I nod to Margolis and follow her out.

She's halfway down the street, heels clacking against the sidewalk. Muggles move out of her way, turning back to take her in. I catch up to her quickly, watching a few curls fall loose while magic dances down her arms.

Maybe this is what our partnership looks like. Maybe this is fighting on the same side, with that fire directed somewhere else, so I just get to sit back and watch.

We pause at a corner and that dark coil in my chest springs.

Only we're not fighting together. She's fighting *for* me. She's stepping in because the spoiled Death Eater is so misunderstood.

My champion again. Like my trial. Stepping in when no one asked her to.

"I'm sorry for them," she speaks. "I'm sorry they don't see you the way I do"

And how exactly is that? My heart beats and my skin buzzes. She steps through the crosswalk, leaving me behind and I remember her house elves and her dragons. Her werewolves.

Her *undervalued people.*

"I don't need your pity, Granger," I hear myself hiss.

She turns, eyes wide. And I recognize this look, this surprise. From the courtroom corridor.

"You don't have my pity." Her eyes scan me up and down, and she says, "You have my respect."

She spins on a heel, shaking her head, and disappears around the corner. I hear a *crack* that a few Muggles jump at, looking to the street for signs of an auto backfiring.

I stand on the corner, chewing the inside of my cheek, wondering how in Merlin's name I'd earned it.

The next morning she's in a flowing lavender dress with matching heels and it's possibly the most modest design Pansy has given her and I still have to meditate for a few minutes to calm my thoughts.

I send Pansy a quick note to pop by when she can, and she's climbing through my fireplace as I tuck away the image of the buttons on the front of Granger's dress.

She's folding herself into my guest chair, saying she was going to stop by anyway, and I'm regretting this, but here she is.

"Do you…" I stop, try again. "Could you…" I rake my hands over my face.

She levels her eyes at me. "Draco, are you having a stroke?"

"How does your contract with Granger work?" I mumble through my fingers.

She blinks. "I send her a box every Sunday evening with that week's clothes and instructions on wear. She has free reign to choose the order of her outfits, but I do give suggestions." She waits for me to comment. "Is there something coming up? I already know about *Witch Weekly*. I'll meet with her today—"

"Do you have record of what you're sending? Designs or…" My cheeks flush and I roll my eyes at myself. "This is ridiculous. Please forget this conversation ever happened."

I lean my forehead against the marble desk, clasping my hands behind my head.

"Easy. Because this conversation *isn't* happening," she deadpans. "Is there an issue with the clothes? Is she not wearing them right?"

"Oh she's wearing 'em great," I hum into the desk.

"Then what's the—"

I sit up, eyes away from her. "Can you send me a copy of what you're sending her on Sundays?"

"I don't think they'll fit you, Draco," she says, and I glare at her arched brow. "I don't feel comfortable with you controlling or censoring her wardrobe—"

"I'm just trying to prepare myself. For what's coming." I press the heels of my hands into my eyes. "Get an idea of what I'll be dealing with."

Pansy chuckles. I keep my face hidden.

"Where's the fun in that?" she sings. "It's like I'm giving you a present every morning. Just begging to be unwrapped."

"Pansy—"

"You don't need an itemized list of clothing, Draco. You need a wank."

"I've had one of those, thank you."

"You need a second one."

"I've had one of those, thank you."

"Really? It's barely ten in the morning."

I peel my hands from my face and push my hair back.

"What are your next steps?" she says.

I swallow and look out my window. "My next step is seeing my father this weekend. He's required my visitation for the first two months, so I'm getting January out of the way this weekend."

"And with her?" she asks, sitting forward. "What are your next steps with her?"

I study the marble of my desk.

"We're working on this werewolf policy—"

"Draco," she cuts me off.

I look up at her. "There are no next steps with her. There are contracts, there are rules," I hiss. "Just because she's wearing different clothes doesn't mean I get to fall into bed with her."

She laughs. "Who said anything about that!" She crosses her legs and smiles. "You get to spend time with her now. 'Business lunches' and the like. You can invite her to events and galas. And," she says, raising a brow, "the next time Skeeter asks you about her, you can compliment her. Without using the word 'logical."

I groan, and close my eyes. Pansy laughs and I look at my clock.

"Speaking of business meetings, I have two today. One starting in five minutes."

Pansy lifts herself from her chair, and says, "Perfect. Invite her to come along with you."

"I… it's not really her department."

"Does that matter?" She shrugs. "Invite her. Let her know how important she is not only to the company, but also to you." She leads us to the door as I consider how I could invite her to lunch with the perfect blend of business and personal reasons. "Draco," Pansy says, stopping with her hand on the door. "If you don't move on her soon, someone else will." She lifts a brow, and I immediately think of Hartford. "I don't know you if you've noticed, but she looks quite good in my clothes."

She winks at me.

"Yes, thank you, Pansy." I grab my suit jacket.

"I mean have you *seen* her arse?" She widens her eyes comically.

"Yes, thank you, Pansy."

She opens the door, laughing and then coos, "Hermione, dear! Wonderful, I was just coming to see you."

I slip my arm through my jacket sleeve, about to call her bluff when I see Granger truly is standing at my door. She meets my eyes and looks back and forth between Pansy and me.

"Perfect," Granger says. "We can go to my office."

"Did you want me?" I ask, and try not to wince at my choice of words.

She sputters. I decide to give it a try.

"Er, actually if you're available for lunch, my client would like to meet you," I say. I look away from her and ask Carrie for my files. "One of the Honeydukes sellers is suing Honeydukes, and is quite the fan of yours."

There. A business meeting. And should we make small talk while we wait for the client to arrive, it would simply be a bonus.

"No. I'm not free." Sharp.

I look up at her, and she's frowning. Like she can see right through me.

What a bloody disaster.

"Alright," I say, and before I can send a glare to Pansy or ask Granger why she won't join me, I excuse myself to the lifts, watching my shoes against the carpets.

~*~

Friday, January 28, 2000

I have a letter from a Mr. Townsend. A perfect excuse to see her today.

I head to her office, and I hear laughter from inside. Blaise probably. I knock on the doorframe and find her smiling at Hartford, notes and papers forgotten on her desk.

"Hartford." I greet him and he smiles at me. He doesn't even have the sense to shuffle papers or look busy. "How's the opening statement?"

"We're almost done with it, and then I'll send it over to you for review."

"Excellent." I look at her, still smiling from whatever Hartford had been saying. "Granger, a Mr. Townsend is very interested in the Werewolf Policy." I have to look away. "He wants to have dinner with us next week to talk about financial support." I hand her the letter. "Tuesday at seven."

I watch her eyes skim the words, and decide I should go. They are in the middle of… something, and haven't asked me to join them.

Not that I would want to…

Fuck everything.

I roll my eyes at myself and leave, huffing.

"Malfoy." And I spin to see her, chasing after me. "I – I can't do seven on Tuesday. I have … I have a thing." She looks away, guilty almost.

Tuesday was Mr. Townsend's preferred day. I ask her if rescheduling is a possibility, and she stammers, fumbling her words, trying to explain… something.

Her eyes drift back towards her office, as she cobbles an excuse. And as I struggle to understand her words, I follow her stare. Follow it back to Hartford.

Busy on Tuesday. With Hartford. Not even the decency to ask her out on a Saturday evening, Corban?

She mumbles something but I'm not listening. Blaise was supposed to watch him. Pansy shouldn't have made her so desirable.

And she shouldn't have said yes.

I step closer to her, lowering my voice.

"If you are postponing this *very* important meeting for something non-essential, I would question your priorities Granger," I say. "I'd hate to think that you'd prioritize a *date* above your Werewolf Policy."

She stares at me, caught in a lie. Awful liar, really.

"I don't have a date," she sneers, and I narrow my eyes. "And even if I did, if I say I'm unavailable for a meeting, *I'm unavailable for a meeting*, Malfoy."

The fire sparks in her eyes, and I miss the way she used to call me Draco. Miss the wrapping paper and the Gainsworth novels.

"Fine. I'll ask to reschedule." I turn on my heel to return to my office.

"Wednesday is best for me. I'm unavailable Thursday, as well."

I turn back to her, thinking of the dinner Mother has set up with Siobhan Selwyn to discuss her Diagon Alley boutique. "Wednesday is not good for me."

"Oh, Malfoy, I'd hate to hear that you'd prioritize a *date* above your company," she snarls back, rolling her eyes and disappearing into her office.

I growl and head back to mine.

I pace for twenty minutes, trying to get myself back together. Trying to let go of petty things like Corban Hartford and center my thoughts on my clients. Try to build a wall back up.

I call Blaise into my office in the afternoon, and tell him he needs to try again. Needs to push my thoughts away into corners.

He tries. It's not good enough.

At four o'clock she pops into my office to update me on her branch's finances and we bicker then too.

I can't concentrate for the rest of the day.

There's an address in my rolodex. Someone I'd looked up ages ago, before the war. When Severus had been taking on too much. Had been disappearing from his Headmaster's Office to chase Potter around the woods, and had made it clear that he didn't intend to survive the final war.

Someone in New York.

I pull a blank parchment and quill.

~*~

Saturday, January 29, 2000

The Azkaban guard opens the door for me, and I walk into the small meeting room. My father leans against the side of the metal table, reading the paper.

"Father."

The door closes.

"Draco, how good of you to visit." He folds the newspaper and turns to me.

"I said I would. January and February."

"And here you are, with two days to spare." He levels a scowl at me, then holds up the paper, and I see Granger's dark hair and green dress. "This is excellent."

I blink. I've forgotten how to take a compliment from my father. It's not even my compliment, really.

He continues, "Has your client list increased? Your visibility is surely up."

"I… Yes, I've had strong, positive reactions to the article. To her."

He gestures that I should sit. "And Pansy's work is brilliant. Truly stunning," he says. I nod and take my chair. "She's so much *more* like this, don't you think?"

I clench my jaw. "More what?"

"More prepared. More desirable. And it's lovely to see that ridiculous hair of hers tamed. Not a wild young thing any longer." He sits across from me and I press my lips together, swallowing any comments about loving her wild hair. He smirks at me. "Much more like a Malfoy wife."

I look between his two eyes, searching him, waiting for his game.

He says, "How are things between you two?"

"Completely professional," I say. "She's an employee of mine and there are contracts in place. You told me to show restraint, and I have. I would never do anything to jeopardize the office."

He watches me, and then hums. "And what about outside the office?" A sly smile. "At your little bookstore?"

I scowl at him. "No. She doesn't even work there anymore."

He lifts a brow. "Really?" He leans back in his chair. "Are you positive?"

I watch him. A slow grin spreads across his mouth.

"Yes."

"She was there just last week." He tilts his head at me. "Assisting Corban Hartford with a few top-shelf books."

I feel my heartbeat in my fingertips. I remember her on a ladder, reaching for the high shelves. Her t-shirt stretching away from her jeans. And her skin.

I swallow and look back at him. He grins.

"There's no Love Contract between Miss Granger and Mr. Hartford, correct?"

~*~

I push through the lopsided door at Cornerstone Books, and there she is. Like no time has passed. Reading a book behind the counter.

"I thought you quit this job."

She looks up, startled by me. "No. Should I have?"

"Yes."

She blinks at me. And when she snaps something back about "logical thoughts," I try to formulate some of my own. She's in her denims again. Thin cotton shirt. And her hair is back. Down again and running wild.

I follow her through the stacks, stand behind her, stand close to her. I can hardly believe she's real. I thought I'd lost her.

I tell her to quit. She doesn't like that. I pull something out of my arse about a Conflict of Interest, and she can tell I'm reaching.

But this version of her is ours. And she's reaching for books for Hartford. And Lucius is still spying on her here.

She's ignoring me, rolling her eyes and placing books back on the shelves, jeans stretching tight. And I make no sense to myself when I say, "Besides, you have a contract with Pansy. If the wrong person saw what you wear to this bookstore on the weekends, you'd be jeopardizing her career as well as your image."

She spins to glare at me, challenging me. I insult her Muggle wear and she scoffs at me.

"You are in charge of me Monday through Friday, Malfoy. Saturday and Sunday are my days off to do with as I please. I will work at this bookstore as long as I please."

And she ignores me again. Re-shelving. Dismissing me.

I lean against the stacks, pressing closer to her.

Look at me.

She tries to move around me again, and I pin her in.

"For as long as you are employed by Malfoy Consulting, Granger, you will behave and dress as such," I hiss. "If you would like to go back to working as a Ministry dreg, filing reports and failing to create lasting change for your blessed creatures, be my guest."

"I am only 'employed' Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, Malfoy. I am free —"

"Oh, I must have missed your resignation on Friday afternoons, followed by your application on Monday mornings then."

"I am only *paid* Monday through Friday. You can only control my whereabouts Monday through Friday."

That fire in her eyes. Her curls dancing as she tilts her head at me. And I don't want anyone else to have her like this. Untamed.

I'm breathless as I ask, "And what would it cost to control your Saturdays and Sundays then, Granger? I'm sure I could more than cover the salary you make here."

Her eyes flit to my mouth before she laughs and says, "I don't *need* more money, Malfoy–"

"Then what is it that you *do* need?"

Ask it of me and it's yours.

I watch her eyes grow wide, and she looks at my mouth again. And I wonder if there's any universe where she's thinking what I am. Thinking of ways I can give her what she needs. Give it to her here, in our bookshop.

And the one voice I'd never thought I'd hear while this aroused: "Hermione? Hello?"

Potter.

Like a jolt going through me. I step away from her. She collects herself and moves to the front without another glance at me.

Potter gives me a strange look when I emerge from the shelves. He's stuck inviting me to lunch, and despite her protests, half an hour later I'm sitting down to tea with Potter, his Weasley, and my Granger, having accomplished none of the goals I set foot in the bookshop to accomplish. And Merlin knows what those even were.

I wonder if this is what a double-date with the Potters would be like. Except the way she's scowling at me. I wonder if I'm sitting in Ron Weasley's chair.

She lifts her coffee cup, holding her saucer underneath with delicate fingers and a practiced hand as Potter prattles about the Ministry Quidditch league since I've been gone.

Strange. She catches me watching her coffee cup and I look away.

~*~

Monday, January 31, 2000

Witch Weekly comes today to do a profile piece on Hermione Granger. Pansy's set up in the spare office that would have belonged to Ogden.

Once I get in and put my things down I go to check on Pansy.

"All good here?"

She's rummaging through her rack of clothes when she responds, "Yes, darling."

"Granger here yet?"

"I'm here," a small voice from behind a curtain responds.

And then she steps out. A blue dress. With lace. A trim waist and a wide skirt. It's like stepping into a Pensieve.

Pansy squeals, and helps her with the buttons. Pansy sends me a grin.

My jaw squeezes. Now this… this she's done on purpose.

I watch as Pansy Parkinson helps Hermione Granger into her Yule Ball dress, and I'm unsure which witch I'm escorting.

I blink, building bricks, laying cement. I tell her about postponing the Senior Consultants meeting and quickly excuse myself to my office.

I sit in my chair, and stare at a blank sheet of paper until I can clear my head. I haven't heard back from New York.

I head up to Melody at the front to see if she has any mail for me from America. And I pass the open door on my way.

The dress is off, thankfully. Tracey and Daphne have started in on her hair and face. Transforming her from the witch at the bookstore to the Modern Business Witch.

I frown when Melody doesn't have anything for me. A half hour later I find a reason to cross the floor again, and find Tracey twisting her hair up.

Tamed, Lucius's voice whispered to me.

Turning her into a Malfoy wife for me.

She meets my eye as I stare across the office, through the open door. I turn quickly to visit Dorothea.

Another fifteen minutes and I'm checking the mail again with Melody. I hear Granger ask Daphne to close the door.

I return to my desk and sit patiently, meditating until Pansy comes to visit me.

"Do you like your present this morning?" She smiles as she shuts the door behind herself.

I sigh. "You know I do." She laughs as she leans her elbows down on the back of my guest chair. "I do have a request…" She lifts her brows at me. "Her hair."

"Her hair?"

"It's not… I mean, isn't her hair a signature look?" I turn to face the window.

"You prefer it down and wild?" she asks, and then a teasing lilt floats into her voices. "Well, Draco, if I'd *known* that all it would take to keep your interest was growing out my hair and getting a perm…"

I glare at her. She chuckles. I clear my throat and say carefully, "Lucius likes it up. He likes that Pansy Parkinson has *tamed* her."

One of her brows slowly inches towards the sky. "He does, does he?" She scowls, pulls herself up tall, and says, "Excuse me."

She exits and I'm alone for a total of sixty seconds before my door is slammed open and a barefoot vixen is screaming at me about her hairstyle. I can't stop staring at her feet as she paces and stomps and tells me off for having an opinion about her clothes or her hair.

"I don't understand why you are allowed to have any opinion on my hair for my photoshoot!"

"It was a suggestion—" I try.

"Keep them to yourself!"

"What is going on with you?"

"Nothing is 'going on' with me—"

"You've been acting like a bitch for days!"

She gasps and steps into me. "Maybe I've just realized that you've been a dick for months!"

She's begging for a fight today. And Blaise is there to stop us, suggest we shut the door. She storms out, and Blaise looks back at me.

"You reckon she's naked under that bathrobe?" he asks.

I frown. "Go away."

I don't hear from the Modern Business Witch again that morning. I'm just starting the Senior Consultant meeting, deciding not to wait on her any longer when she flies into the conference room, hair in an elegant twist, and blue dress on again.

She apologizes to everyone and walks to me. To her *seat*. Walks to her seat.

She glances up through her long lashes and permits me to continue.

To hold a meeting, while she looks like that. While she sits in a chair next to me, looking like a dream.

I clear my throat and continue.

She has a new proposal. And I have to listen to her give a presentation without remembering a blue dress spinning, and lifting to show her knees.

"I want to make sure the Werewolf Policy is fully funded before you start other projects that also need fundraising."

She doesn't seem to understand me. We bicker in front of the other staff, and it's like she doesn't understand what a quarterly budget is.

"Like I said, an excellent project for April. We can send you and Walter out to Somerset in March to start collecting data."

I stand and dismiss everyone. She mutters a curse under her breath, some insult that has Mockridge raising a brow at me.

I follow her back to her office, and maybe we'll have this fight after all.

The door hits me on the way in, and I almost see her grin.

"Why am I even here, Malfoy?" she sneers. I close the door, eyeing her carefully. "You told me you wanted to 'make a difference' and 'change the world.' What utter hogwash."

I try to explain the budget again. She paces the room, and the movement brushes her skirt. Like she's dancing in the Great Hall again.

I place my hands in my pockets to keep from reaching out for her.

Her hands go to her hips and she's interrupting me: "Are you punishing me?"

"Punishing you?"

"Yes, because I haven't quit Cornerstone?"

Oh, she is pushing *all* the buttons today.

She screeches at me again, and I step into her. "Granger-"

"Why am I even here Malfoy?! At Malfoy Consulting?" Her hands fly out wide.

"I wanted the best –"

"You said everyone needed a second chance, but I guess you weren't talking about magical creatures. You were talking about the Malfoy family and their reputation."

She pokes me hard in the chest. And I think of Mockridge's judgmental eyes as she insulted me moments ago.

"Watch your tone, Granger."

She can talk to me like this at the bookstore. Even at the Manor, over a bowl of pumpkin soup. But not here. Not when she's been costumed as the Modern Business Witch, Senior Consultant.

She couldn't be both.

"I'm glad I could really 'round' out your senior staff, Malfoy," she hisses. "My god, without me you wouldn't have made your Mudblood quota." My eyes twitch at the word. "How would you have ever changed public opinion of the Malfoy family without one? Isn't that right?"

She's burning. Something so violent I haven't seen it since September. Since Gainsworth. Shoving a book into my chest and demanding that I read it. Or maybe before that. Reaching

back to third year, with her palm connecting with my cheek.

She's rambling, blazing. Calling me out for having an all-male staff. Suggesting that her only worth to me is that she's Muggleborn and female.

"Stop. Stop there, Granger." We have to go back. We have to start over.

"No, thanks. I'm not quite done." And she comes to stand in front of me, eyes on fire, blue dress spinning. "I'm assuming that the most important quality that I bring to this team, seeing as it clearly has nothing to do with my relationship with the magical creature community, is that I am Hermione Granger, *Golden Girl*. Were you hoping I'd spread a bit of that golden dust around, Malfoy? I admit, it makes for excellent photo shoots with your pal Skeeter!"

She shoves me. And I clench my fists to keep from grabbing her. She's too close. And she's dressed in Pansy's clothes. Not at all the girl I want. I want the curls. The jeans.

"Is that it, Malfoy? Is it nice having the Golden Girl to show off, to headline your Daily Prophet articles? Well if it's not my blood status or my gender, it must be my *celebrity*."

She shoves me again. And I *try*. I try to put her back in her box. Try to breathe deep. Try to walk out.

And I'm struck again by the idea that there's two of them. One elegant Modern Business Witch with long lines and smooth skin, begging me to ravish her. And one Golden Girl, with fire and wit, burning to take over the world and fight me every step of the way. And I'll always be betraying one with the other.

Her eyes are bright, wet. And she screams, "Or maybe, I'm only here to play dress up with Pansy! Is that it, Malfoy? Giving a doll to your fucking *girlfriend*?"

She shoves me again, and I have to touch her back. Have to know if she's really here. I snap up her wrist, and tug her close to me.

"Don't. Touch me." I warn her. I look into her eyes, telling her things will change. If you push me any further, I'll snap.

She heaves air against my lips, hair falling from the perfect twist. This brazen witch begging for me to snap.

And maybe I can have both. Maybe it's not betrayal. Maybe they're the same. And I can have them both.

She reaches her hand back and slaps my chest again.

And I pull her to me, breathing her into my lips, fingers grabbing for her twisted hair. It's the same. She's both of them, and I can have her. She asked me to.

And a long-imagined theory blossoms to life when she opens her mouth to let me in.

She tastes like coffee and sin.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

> Hello! What a treat for you all if you were reading Every Day, a Little Death as well! Two updates in one weekend!
>
> This chapter is MEATY. No fat to trim here.
>
> Also, I've mentioned it before, but I am on Tumblr and Twitter as Lovesbitca8 if anyone wants to say hi. I am always open to asks on Tumblr, and I do a lot of teasing for the Auction fic over there... ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Friday, January 13, 1995

She's at my fucking table again.

There's one spot in the library that is tucked away enough to discourage people from ever finding you. It's also got the perfect table. It doesn't shake, it doesn't have annoying curse words etched into the wood.

There's sunlight from one of the few windows on the north wall that hits the book pages just right.

I haven't sat at that table in *months* because of her.

She's practically climbing into the tomes in front of her, hunched over in her seat, and scribbling notes on Potter's egg.

Merlin forbid Potter himself do the work. All the other Champions weren't assigned a clever witch to figure it out for them.

I frown at her profile again, watching as she flips the pages quickly.

She hasn't kept the hair from the Yule Ball. Her fuzzy curls are back, circling her head like a strange collar. And whatever she'd done to her skin to make it look smooth and dewy has been washed away.

She stretches her arms above her head, and sets down her quill, swapping it for a berry-blue Sugar Quill. I raise my brow, judging her obscene taste in sweets. If she wants a lolly from Honeydukes, she should try the Raspberry Raspy. It buzzes in your throat and changes your voice for half an hour. Or the Chocolate Cherry Bomb. More expensive. She probably can't afford that.

She leans back in her chair, pulling her book into her lap to lean against the table, and reads carefully, lips pulling around the tip of the Sugar Quill.

She'll get blue lips from it. Idiot.

Blue lips and a blue tongue.

I watch as her cheeks hollow out, sucking, popping the quill from her lips absently as she reads. Her eyes widen and she reaches for her parchment, scribbling a few words while her eyes scan the book. She jumps when she realizes she's been trying to write with the Sugar Quill.

I smile. Stupid little cow.

She pops the Sugar Quill deep between her lips, holding it there, and grabs her writing quill.

Lips pressed tight around the blue sugary feather. Pursed forward, popping her cheekbones.

Strong lips.

Blue lips.

Not thin like Tracey Davis'. Or smart and wide like Pansy's. Just… blue. And soft.

And I wonder about her blue tongue, and if it's strong too. If she knows how to use it yet. If Krum's taught her. If she's let him kiss her and taste her blue lips yet.

Maybe the only way she knows how to kiss is now through Krum. Sloppy and wet and harsh. No finesse from the Bulgarians.

She'd have to learn how kiss better after Krum. She'd have to soften her blue lips and let someone taste her sweet blue tongue, let them press into her and lick at her small teeth. And bite down on her bottom lip and suck the sugar from her.

The Sugar Quill pops from her mouth, the echo of it ricocheting off the library walls.

She looks up and right at me. I narrow my eyes automatically, and she looks down, rubbing the blue sugar away.

~*~

Monday, January 31, 2000

Maybe if I keep pressing my mouth against hers, she'll kiss me back.

If I don't let her breathe… she'll have to open her mouth at some point.

I feel bile in my throat. This is a mistake.

I press my mouth to hers again.

She doesn't want this.

But I concentrate on the feeling of my hand in her tightly wound hair, drinking this in for as long as she'll let me.

How do I explain this to her after she's slapped me. After she's glaring at me, scared and unsafe.

I'll stop now. Just once more. I memorize her lips beneath mine, fingers twisting in her hair. My other hand squeezes her wrist, and I drag my lips across hers one last time—

She opens her mouth, and I groan into her, angling her head just how I want it. She draws a quick breath from my lungs and then I'm pressing into her, tasting her tongue and dripping my desire into her like honey.

Her hand curls against my chest and I'd never considered her hands. Never known what she would do with them. Never imagined she could touch me back.

I breathe harshly against her mouth, and drag her backwards by her head. I need…

I need…

She squeaks, and I scrape my teeth over her lips. She gasps and I can hear myself moaning.

If she'll let me, I need…

She bumps against the desk, and I drag my hand from her hair, down her neck. I need her knees open.

If she'll let me.

My hips so close to hers.

What will she give me?

This dress. I can ruck it up to her waist. If she doesn't protest I can go to my knees for her, show her what it's like for me to want her like this.

The pressure of her hand on my ribs, and if she touches me again I'll snap. Just unbuckle and push inside.

I wonder about her hands then. Will she hold onto me?

She sighs a dreamy breath against my lips and I take her hands off me, pressing them back on the desk.

Please stay.

She lets me lap at her tongue, pressing into her mouth and swallowing her sounds. I wonder if she'll let me press her close, feel how hard I am and gasp.

I push her knees open.

This dress. This fucking dress. I run my hands down her stomach, nipping at her, never leaving her mouth.

I don't want to hear her stop me. I don't want to have the memory of her voice telling me "no."

I wonder how much she'll give me. Could I lay her down on her desk? Would I be able to watch her face as I enter her, just looking down at her when we press together, fingers sliding over her legs.

Or should I just make her come? Drive her insane with it so she only wants me forever?

My mouth is ravenous at the thought. Devouring her. And she's kissing me back. The best feeling.

Her fingers on my jaw suddenly. Not pushing me away, pressing to hold me to her. Like she wants me.

My hips snap. I grab for her thigh, pressing her hips close to me.

Going to grind her into this desk. Going to fuck her so slowly she'll beg me for it. Going to fuck her with my tongue until she's screaming, dragging her fingers through my hair—

"Hermione, you ready—?"

I drop her. She scrambles to sit up on the desk, wiping at her mouth.

Potter is here. For lunch.

"I can come back later."

"No!" And she's saying it with me. Like she knows I wouldn't have stopped. Like she knows Potter just saved her from me.

I'm dizzy as I push past Potter, keeping my eyes on the floor and keeping my hands from choking him. I'm aware that the entire floor staff is watching me as I cross to my office. Such a long walk. Why did I do that? She should have been next to me. With a door between offices.

I'm still half-hard in my trousers, and I pray to the gods that no one is looking. We didn't silence the room. Everyone could hear yelling… and I'm trying to remember if she moaned too loud, and I have to close my eyes when I relive those sounds…

I get to my office and I shut the door. I silence the room.

"FUCK!"

The leather couch blasts open. Foam and fluff spraying like blood. The Tiffany lamp my mother gave me as an office-warming gift shatters.

I feel my head heavy as I struggle to bring in air, and I place my hands on my knees, bending and breathing.

A knock on my door. I squeeze my eyes. I want it to be her. I don't want it to be her.

"Mr. Malfoy." Blaise. "Is this a good time to discuss the Cannons?"

No.

But he's helping the image. Business as usual. I lean against the wall near the door. With a wave of my hand, the door clicks open just enough. He pushes himself through and shuts it behind him.

"My couch…" Like I just ate his last chocolate frog.

I pace across my office, trying to breathe. Trying to figure out what possessed me.

Her hot eyes and flushed cheeks, that's what.

It's no reason to… No excuse for…

"What are you saying?" Blaise stops me.

Have I been speaking out loud?

"I kissed her."

My eyes on the expensive carpets and how my shoes tear across them as I pace.

"I'll have to check who had that in the office pool." Blaise chuckles.

"Don't—Don't laugh at this. This is… What have I done?" I lean against the wall, dropping my head back, sucking in air.

"Draco, relax," he says. "You've just taken it to the next level. Not committed a crime."

Haven't I though? Did she want me to kiss her? To lay her down on her desk and fuck her like a tawdry romance?

Did she want any of that?

"She'll quit," I wheeze into the room. "She's going to walk. And I'll never see her again."

I listen to my gasping breath, listen as Blaise mutters a *Reparo* to sew my couch back together. I feel him leading me to it, forcing me down, pushing my head between my knees.

Black spots in front of my eyes. Blaise is talking to me, saying something. His hand on the back of my neck.

"… kiss you back? Think, Draco… apologize and move on… some women may take it as a compliment you know—"

I sit up pressing my hands into my eyes and focus on counting bricks in a circle. I build them up around myself, building me into the tower. Ivy grows around it, locking each brick into place, twisting and growing, sprouting.

I open my eyes.

"I have to go."

Blaise hesitates. "Alright…"

I stand and walk to my door. I poke my head out. "Carrie," I hear my voice. "Contact me immediately if I receive post from America. I'm going out. Gone for the rest of the day." I shut the door before she can even grab a quill.

"America?" Blaise asks.

I grab my coat, reach for the Floo powder.

"Draco—"

"Do the interviews for me, will you?"

I'm stepping through the fireplace and calling out to the Ministry before he can say another word.

~*~

Tuesday, May 7, 1996

It's so cold. Does it have to be this cold?

"Don't think about the temperature, Mr. Malfoy."

Severus sits across from me. A jewelry box between us.

I've never seen Severus sit cross-legged. It's… humanizing in a very disturbing way.

"Why, Draco, you'll make me self-conscious," he teases.

"Get out of my head if you don't want to know what I think."

He frowns at me. Or I assume he does, because I'm not allowed to look away from the jewelry box. I can see the reflection of my shoes in the antique mirrors lining the sides. Brass at the corners.

I let my eyes rove over the edges, memorizing it in a way that I could rebuild it blindly.

I hear him. A small voice in the corner. Behind a door.

Envision the inside of the box.

My eyes take in the velvet inside. Navy blue. Older and fraying, worn down in places. The box has been used. I lean my consciousness forward, taking in the inner wall closest to me, the one I can't see with my normal eyes.

Also blue. Less worn away. Softer.

I lean in further, falling inside. A blue velvet lined room.

I reach my hand out and place it on the wall, watching the velvet threads shift directions, memorizing the path of my hand.

I spell my name with my pointer finger, large as my head.

And without him telling me to, I erase my name, walk to the corner of the box, and in letters as large as my chest I begin to spell –

H E R M I O N E

Evenly across the wall. Blue velvet memorizing her name, the pattern sinking into the fabric.

I hear him again, from above me. Outside of the jewelry box. Like a puppeteer. And I am the marionette.

Step out of the jewelry box. Take only what you need.

I push myself up to the edge, like a swimming pool. The blue velvet laps at my heels, swaying as I disturb the waters.

I sit on the ledge. Take only what I need.

I guess I need my mother. And my father. Sometimes I need Blaise and Pansy. I don't really need Crabbe and Goyle but –

And then memories splashing at my calves in the blue velvet. My first broom. I was four. Maybe five. Meeting Vincent. He'd laughed at my impression of the Minister of Magic even though he had no clue who Fudge was. Blaise on the Hogwarts Express, asking me if I'd just go ahead and kill myself if I was sorted into Hufflepuff.

Pansy in the Hospital Wing, holding my slashed arm. Theo and Milicent Bulstrode forced to kiss in Spin the Bottle in second year. First day of Potions class, and Severus awards me house points for being brilliant. A bobbing hand in the air, brown hair swishing as she waits to be called on—

No.

I have to leave that behind.

Take it.

I frown into the pool of blue velvet, but listen to Severus.

Watching my mother and father kiss at New Year's Eve when I was six. My father telling me I could have a glass of the 500-year-old scotch on my birthday. My father reviewing my marks and asking if I was below anyone. My father with his hand on my shoulder, pushing me forward – *My son, Draco. My heir.*

I take these memories. I take the rest with me. I stumble whenever I come across a bushy-haired buck-toothed Muggleborn Gryffindor, but Severus tells me to take her.

The Yule Ball. And I'm dizzy watching her dance. I push that back into the waters and Severus says nothing.

On top of Pansy, and closing my eyes, imagining her beneath me. I blush with Severus this close, but he says nothing and lets me slide that back into the blue velvet.

We wade through everything. The Dark Lord in my drawing room. I want to leave it behind, keep his red eyes away from me. But then he'll be down there with her. So, I bring him out.

Every meeting with Severus is left in the box. The waters getting thin.

I'm at present. Severus gestures to the floor in front of his desk, tells me to sit cross-legged. He asks if I've brought the box.

The waters shift, and then I'm back at the Yule Ball watching her calves, watching her bright perfectly-sized teeth. Watching Krum. I try to push it back into the velvet lining, but Severus brings it forward again.

We cut the evening into pieces, bringing some out and leaving some. I think I understand the trick, the way to leave her in the box, but then he's bringing her smile forward. And the partner dance. And the way her hand wouldn't touch mine, her bright eyes, my heartbeat.

My heartbeat.

My heartbeat.

We sever it.

My flushed skin. Her rising chest, pulling tight across her breasts.

They pour into the box. And we take the rest.

Pansy's beneath me. And the thought of longer hair. Curls. Wider hips. The closer I am to coming the more we cut away until just the memory of losing my virginity to Pansy Parkinson after the Yule Ball splashes out of the jewelry box.

I'm sweating by the time we reach yesterday, when I almost bumped into her outside the Great Hall. Her lips parted and my eyes dropped to them before I could sneer.

Her lips float through the velvet, lining the sides, kissing her name that I've written with my fingers like it was her skin.

Snap!

I blink. And I'm in the classroom, on the floor with Severus. He's closed the lid of the box.

My eyes are seeing lights as I try to breathe, try to focus, try to remember what day it is.

He stands, fluidly. I try to follow and fall back to my knees, sweat pouring from my temple, gasping for air.

He lifts the box from the floor, and I feel a sense of terror that he'll destroy it.

It's mine. Those are mine.

He extends the box to me. I take it and meet his eyes.

His brow is damp, but he looks the same, unaffected, unembarrassed.

"It gets easier," he says, and sweeps from the room.

~*~

Monday, January 31, 2000 - later

I haven't been to New York City since I was a child. Mother wanted to shop on Fifth Avenue. It was the first time I had been exposed to Muggles – No-majs. Whatever.

The emergency portkey I'd spent two hours and several hundred Galleons acquiring dropped me off near the pier in the afternoon sun. I walked the block to 679 West 24th Street and stand now on the doorstep of a brownstone.

I ring the bell, waiting on the steps. A few minutes later, the door pulls open to reveal an old woman, with long white hair in a dressing gown. Her makeup impeccable, and I wouldn't know that she was 97 by looking at her. She doesn't look a day older than sixty. Her large green eyes look me up and down, a smirk forming on her pink lips.

"Sugar, I'm too old for you." She winks.

"Queenie Goldstein?"

She smiles slowly at me. "I would have responded to your letter sooner if I knew you'd just show up. I'm not able to help you, Mr. Malfoy."

She starts to shut the door, and my hand shoots up to the jam. "Please, Ms. Goldstein—"

"It's Kowalski, please. There's nothing left of him but his name, honey."

"Mrs. Kowalski," I try. "I just need an hour."

"You don't need an hour, you need a shrink—"

"I can pay you."

"You can't solve everything with money, Draco Malfoy. You need to put those gorgeous lips to work and speak to *Miss Granger*, not me."

I feel it like a lightning bolt, shuddering through me. I never said her name. I never said it was about a girl.

I stare at her, throat trying to make words. I have no security. No walls. If the Dark Lord was alive and in front of me, he'd already know about her.

There's a jewelry box somewhere, but I can't even visualize it.

Her eyes drift over my face, reading me, and she says, "You're a pretty young thing. Is it really so bad to be in love with another pretty young thing?"

My mouth opens and I can't squeak out the words. But then she smiles and steps to the side, inviting me in. I thank her, removing my coat and hanging it on the coatrack before she can take it from me. She leads me through her brownstone, dropping me into the parlour and taking my tea order.

"Honey, if you have it, please."

She's already holding the honey, and I realize she probably doesn't need me to respond to any question she asks. She can see it in my mind before I speak it.

"Actually," she says, "I prefer to hear your words." I blush. "It's very lonely only hearing your own voice. I welcome the conversation."

I nod, spooning in the honey, and look around her sitting room. A fireplace with pictures of a younger Queenie Goldstein with a portly man in France. The two of them a bit older in front of the brand-new Empire State Building.

How long has she been alone?

"Twenty years."

I look to her, and she's mixing milk and sugar cubes into her tea. She's not even looking at me, but she can dive into my mind. Severus couldn't do that. Only the Dark Lord.

"The dark wizard Grindelwald too." She looks up at me and I glance away, embarrassed by my thoughts. "I'm sorry. I'm doing it again." She sets her spoon down and looks at me kindly. "Why are you here, Draco Malfoy?"

I hesitate, wondering if I should think things. What I should reveal.

"Just talk to me," she says. "Like we're old friends."

I swallow, and stall by sipping my tea. Merlin… American tea is just—

"Awful, I know," she hums.

I smile at her and begin.

"I trained to be an Occlumens when I was fifteen. Severus Snape tutored me in Compartmentalization and Separation, and then my Aunt Bellatrix Lestrange taught me the rudimentary methods without knowing I was already proficient." I look at her. She's watching me while trailing bony fingers on her saucer. "I'm losing control more often. And I need a Legilimens to push me, to strengthen my walls."

She nods, looking down to my fingers, and they twitch under her eyes.

"Why don't you go to your grandmother?"

My heart swells in my chest. "Do you know her?"

"No," she says, and I realize I've thought about her at some point. She's read her from me. She's right on the surface.

"I…" I don't really know how to explain to her. To tell her about the stroke when she'd read in the paper that her favorite daughter and grandson had been sent to Azkaban, only a month after reading about the death of one daughter and her only granddaughter.

Queenie Goldstein nods and tilts her head. "You keep that hidden."

I blink at her. "I suppose I do."

"I couldn't read that stroke from you until now. Did you pack that away?"

I peel back the wallpaper in a drawing room about this size, with tea and scones and inheritance. A woman with my mother's eyes and Bellatrix's nose sips at her tea and asks me how much I'll need.

I blink, taping the lilac wallpaper back up with scotch tape. The last time I saw her before the stroke. To ask for money for an Auction that never happened.

"Hm."

I look back to Queenie Kowalski née Goldstein. Thirty years older than my grandmother but just as youthful.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I didn't mean to pry." She sets her tea down. "You feel guilty asking for the money, but she probably loved to see you anyways."

I lean forward, elbows on my knees and hand my head in my hands. I press my temples, remembering my training. Trying to breathe and remember how to push something back into place.

"It's alright that you haven't visited her since the stroke. Some people can't handle—"

"Stop." My fingers dig into my skull, like trying to drag the memories from my temples. I stand, and pace over to her fireplace. There's a few Christmas decorations she hasn't put away yet. And I wonder if she has anyone to help her.

Thankfully, she doesn't answer me. I stare at the portly man. Her husband. "Kowalski?" I ask.

"Jacob."

I nod and stare at the two of them in France. He looks dazed.

"He was a Muggle," she says.

"Muggle-born?" I ask, fingers resting on the frame.

"No."

I frown. A Muggle and a witch in the twenties.

I hear the clinking of a teacup, and she asks, "Why do you still need Occlumency?"

I resist turning to her. I can pretend she can't hear me.

"I'm losing control. Making choices that aren't me. Giving in to… more basic urges."

She chuckles. "You're twenty."

"I'm nineteen."

"Even more delicious."

I smirk at the mantle, and I know she hears it.

"Why do you need to be in control?" she asks.

My brows pull together. I think of M.C.G. and the role I play there. I think of the games I play with my father. I think of her lips.

"What else is there?"

She is silent. I let her drift through me.

"It's a shame you had to learn Occlumency at such a young age," she says, and I immediately think of Severus. Of a classroom and a bookbag on my shoulder and the dark twist of fear in my gut – *If the Dark Lord finds out—*

I blink and Queenie continues, "The years a teenage boy should be expressing their feelings. Giving in to those 'urges.' And you were left to fight it every step of the way. I've met some good Catholic boys less restrained than you, doll."

"I can't tell if that's a compliment."

She hums.

It feels better like this. Facing away from her. Keeping a separation.

"Voldemort is gone, sugar. So, who are you protecting her from?"

Me, I think for her. I swallow. I search for the reason, landing on a million small ones. Ones she can see.

"She doesn't want me. A relationship," I correct. "She told my mother that she will never be mine."

I hear the tap of manicured nails on an armrest. "Maybe because you weren't the one askin'."

I frown, shaking my head. "I won't recover. If she won't…" I pace. "I kissed her today with no provocation—"

"Oh, she was provoking you plenty—"

"And I'll do it again. It'll drag me under. I can't—"

I choke, and just open to her, letting her see things. See my desires. See her under me, surrounding me. See her thighs around me as my lips suck at her chest. See her in my bed, scratching at me. See her on her knees in my office, unbuckling me. On all fours with me behind her. In the bathtub with my fingers inside of her. Legs and arms clutching me as I push into her.

I slam the wall back up, heat flushing me. I turn to her guiltily, and Queenie conjures a fan, cooling herself off while smirking at me.

"You can come over *anytime*."

I smile weakly. "It's too much," I whisper.

She closes the fan. "Because you held yourself back for the last four years. The years you were supposed to be feeling this way. It's like you're going through puberty all over again."

I run a hand down my face. "I have my own business. I'm an adult now. I can't be acting this way. And my father…"

I feel her inside and I shut her out quickly. She lifts a brow.

She presses her lips together. "So, what do you want to do? Push her into a corner like your grandmother until she's not even a passing fancy? That won't last."

"It's lasted me this long."

She looks away. "I don't agree with your methods, sugar. It's a band aid. It'll come off. You're so wrapped up in her," she says. "You won't have much left after that."

I swallow. "That's fine."

She sighs, considering. I ask her in my mind. I let her see the meetings I've been distracted in, the incident with Noelle. I open up the scene with my father, when I begged him to let her work at Malfoy Consulting. Begged him to let me keep her.

She frowns, and gestures for me to sit. I take the chair, and let her stare at me.

The clock ticks on the wall.

And after a while, she's inside, whispering:

Envision the inside of the box. Blue velvet, isn't it, sugar?

~*~

Monday, December 22, 1997

It takes me far longer than I care to admit to figure out where our kitchen is. In the Manor, I speak aloud the name of an elf and they appear, I ask for what I want, and it is given to me.

But I don't want a trail.

I finally find the large room with small tables and stools, elf-height. I grab a few things from the fruit bowl and find a slice of bread. I look at the knife that rests on the counter, wondering if…

Maybe just before the mission on Christmas. That way if I don't come back…

I pad through the drawing room, past the grandfather clock. Three in the morning.

I cast a silencing charm on the heavy door, and tug it open, heading down the stone steps I used to tumble down as a child. Before we needed a "dungeon."

I light my wand, feeling a twitching in my blood. And there, on the stones, hair as light as my mother's, curly as my aunt's. She could pass as my sister.

She hasn't been given a bed or a blanket, lying on the ground, curled into herself. I'll have to bring that tomorrow.

She turns over, waking at the light. "Hello, Draco."

I nod at her. "Lovegood." I wait for her to scramble back. To beg me to release her. To ask me not to hurt her.

She smiles and says, "Can't sleep?"

What a little loon.

"I brought you a bit of food. Have they been feeding you?" I hand her the bread and fruit.

"Thank you," she says. "They were at first, when Ollivander was here. But since they've taken him I think they've forgotten." She bites into the apple and studies me. "Your dungeon has a nest of Nargles." She points. "There. In that corner."

"Right," I say. "I'll get right on that."

"I have my necklace on, so they leave me alone." She fingers the cork on a chain and takes another bite of the apple. "How are your classes so far?"

Why do I even bother. She's clearly lost it.

"They're… good. I don't think you'll be returning to school though, Lovegood."

She shrugs. "I didn't think so."

"I'll try to bring you food when I can. There's a large mission on Christmas. I may not come back, but my mother will look after you."

She chews her apple, and watches me. As if she isn't a prisoner. "You've changed a tad, haven't you?"

I blink at her. "I suppose we all have."

"You used to be cruel," she says. "You're a different color now."

I narrow my eyes at her. I've spent too long down here, and she's probably delirious with hunger.

I nod at her, saying goodbye.

"Like a navy. Deep like velvet."

My feet stop on the first step. I hear the crunch of an apple, and I feel my heart pounding. I turn to look back at her. "What did you say?"

"Your color is navy blue now."

I stare at her, waiting. "Oh?"

"I see people in colors. Don't you?"

"Not really, no."

She bites down again, chews slowly and says, "For instance, Harry is a green, like his eyes. But I mainly see it from his heart. Lavender Brown is actually neither lavender nor brown." She smiles. "She's a light pink. Parvati's the same." She twists the apple rind. "Hermione Granger is a blue, like sky blue but…"

"Periwinkle," I finish.

She grins. "Yes. You *do* see it. You used to be an orange. It wasn't pretty. But now you're a deep blue navy."

"Like velvet," I say.

"Mm-hm. Velvet inside of something… A box."

I watch with held breath as she bites down again, crunching.

She's a Legilimens. She must be. A rare form. Something strange. I'll need to ask Severus. But first I need to get out. Before she sees more than a blue velvet lining.

But I have to ask.

"What color are you?" I say, still one foot on the stairs.

She smiles. "I don't know. I can't see myself."

She looks down at her arms, looking for pinks and blues. So small. Like a bird. A bird in a cage.

I need to get her out of this dungeon before the end of the war. Before the Auction. She shouldn't have to live through that.

She's wiggling her feet, examining herself for colors.

I look her up and down and say, "You're all of them."

She looks up at me. She smiles.

"Goodnight, Draco. Thank you for dinner."

~*~

Wednesday, February 2, 2000

Queenie Kowalski works with me for four hours. Then I come back on Tuesday and we spend twelve. I have tea with her on Wednesday, and she has a sad look in her eyes I can't interpret, but she does me the favor of trying to find her for a few moments.

I try to pay her, but she says, "Mr. Malfoy, it's been years since a boy as beautiful as you spent any time with me. I'd feel like I should be paying you." She winks at me.

I smirk back in the way that I am supposed to. She stops me on my way down the steps.

"If your grandmother is a true Legilimens…" she says, hand on the door, "she's probably been waitin' to speak to somebody, honey. Go for a visit, will ya? It can get lonely inside."

I blink. I feel like I'm sad. Maybe I am.

The portkey lands me in my office. I take a look about, change my robes, and exit the office to the street, Disapparating when I can. I appear outside the lovely wizarding restaurant Carrie had set up for us.

I don't pause. I open the door and speak with the hostess. Her eyes dance over me, recognizing me, drinking me in. I do the same to her.

She leads me to the table where Hermione Granger sits with Geoffrey Townsend. He stands, shaking my hand and I make my apologies. I settle into my chair across from him.

I feel her eyes on me, but they don't burn any more.

Mr. Townsend mentions Marcus Flint and I feel her twitch. I am angry. But I don't concentrate on why.

When he leaves us at the table alone, she babbles. And the melody is familiar.

On Thursday I sit down with Blaise and Granger to discuss the interviews. I can tell she wants to continue the interviews today. But I choose Blaise. Blaise asks me about New York and I say the weather was nice.

She tries to meet with me on Friday, and I cancel.

Witch Weekly prints a cover of her in periwinkle dress, smiling smartly.

My eye twitches. And I toss the paper across the room like it's burned me.

I meditate that evening, skipping dinner. Mother is concerned, but I tell her in a flat voice that there's nothing to be concerned with.

On Monday, I take my mail from Melody and I can't get my feet to cooperate. I should move back to my office. But's 8:57AM.

I open a letter, reading it. And the lift doors open. I should have left. I look up and she's there, coming through. She nods at me and I watch her walk away.

"Can I get you something, Mr. Malfoy?" Melody asks.

I don't respond. I walk away.

At the Senior Consultant meeting she tries to push the Golden Snidgets again.

"I thought I already shot this down," I say to her. And she looks at me. I feel heat.

"You did. That's why we revised it. For your review."

I open my mouth to protest and she snaps.

"Which means you take it, you read it fully, you think on it, and you come back to me with a decision."

Her eyes burn now. And I think I see a bookstore. But then it's gone.

She tries to start another project and I shoot her down. Something bubbles beneath the surface as she fights back.

On Tuesday, there is a knock at my door as I'm reading a proposal Wentworth brought in yesterday.

I look up and it's her. She's shutting the door.

Her skirt is too short. I blink and look down at my paperwork again.

"I wanted to…I need to give you my notice."

She places a letter on my desk. Folded in threes. Barely a paragraph long explaining why I won't be seeing her any longer.

And my chest cracks in two. And where the wind rattles through my ribs, filling the empty spaces, it blows across blue velvet.

My head spins, calculating. It's been dry and cold inside of me for six days. For six days I haven't felt anything. Haven't thought of her. Haven't looked at her. Haven't touched her. Haven't kissed her.

And she's still leaving.

She's finished speaking. Waiting for me.

"No."

She sputters, "No?"

"I do not accept."

And maybe that's all that needs to be said. Maybe she'll quietly retreat.

I must have forgotten her amongst all this emptiness.

She persists. She names the date of her last day. Like clock counting down until she's gone. But she could just leave and walk out. She didn't have to give notice.

She wants something from me. I can give it to her and she'll stay.

I stand and grab the letter, feeling her eyes on me. They're warm.

I lean on my desk and skim the words, trying to read between her lines.

What does she want?

What's different? The kiss.

I look up at her and it feels like I haven't seen her in weeks. Like I could drown…

"It doesn't say anything in here about your boss sexually harassing you."

Her eyes widen, and maybe that's it.

"No. That is not my intention—"

"And what *is* your intention, Granger?" I toss away her letter. It's meaningless. "What is it you want?"

Tell me.

I've been asking her what she wants for weeks now. And she won't tell me.

"You'll resign if I don't… what?"

She laughs, and I should be offended. I should scowl and hiss back at her. But her teeth…

I clench my fingers around the desktop. Her perfectly-sized teeth. And a blue dress spinning.

"If nothing. This isn't blackmail, Draco—"

Like diving into a pool.

"*Draco*, again." I'm closer to her somehow. "It's been *months* since I've heard that." I could touch her if I'm Draco again. No. "I think the last time was in an alley, whispered into my ear as your fingers gripped my hair—"

Her lips fall open and I swim toward her.

"—or maybe it was on my balcony, you in a white dress, smiling at me like you knew what you were doing—"

She blinks rapidly at me and says, "What are you talking about, Malfoy—"

Don't you dare.

"Can't take it back now. It's *Draco,* again."

Maybe this is what she wants. She misses the chase. She longs to be the siren in the waters, watching me circle her until I'm under the current.

She steps back, creating more space between us and that really should be a sign that she doesn't want me closer. I step in.

"Do you *want* me to make a sexual harassment claim?"

"I *want* you to be honest about why you're leaving, Granger." There's a fire in my blood. And it consumes my skin like a dry forest. "Brave little Gryffindor Golden Girl, let me kiss her, and doesn't know how to take it back."

She laughs at me, and the sound shivers my spine.

"*I'm* the one who wants to take it back?" Her back lands on the wall and I step closer still. "*Draco Malfoy,* calm and collected, never mixing business and personal, kissed an employee and now wants to be *punished* for it."

And maybe she has me pegged. Because I had this under control four minutes ago. Four minutes ago, she was nothing to me but a name carved into the velvet lining of a jewelry box.

My arms press against either side of her head, closer and closer, and for the first time I realize that Potter was the one who stopped us. Blaise was right. She never pushed me away.

So, I push my luck one step further.

"Are you gonna punish me, Granger?" The words course through me, and I bite my lip before I can ask her to.

She trembles, and I almost wrap myself around her. I breathe into her, and she tilts her face up to me.

Fuck.

Oh, fuck.

She'll let me.

I sway into her, and stop. I need her to tell me this time. I need her to decide.

I watch her roll her eyes, and I'm afraid that's the end of it before she's suddenly on me. Her mouth pressing to mine.

And it was her choice.

She kisses me. And I'm drowning in blue velvet.

I moan into her and press against her. Her lips open and I taste her again, pushing into her mouth, and pushing my hips into hers.

She moans. And maybe I've heard it before. Maybe she made noises before. Maybe she did want this.

I have to touch her. I have to—

Her hair. I need—

It's up again. Off her neck. I reach up, and drag the band out of her hair, pressing my nose behind her ear. I can smell her there. Where there's no hair product.

She should never do this. Never keep it from me.

I kiss her there, on her neck, where she smells the most like her. And I need to return to her mouth. Need to keep her lips occupied so she won't stop me. But her skin, her pulse pounding.

My fingers threading through her hair, holding her close, and I can't get enough of her neck. The sounds she spins into the room. The way her breath catches when I suck.

Maybe she'll let me. Maybe she would have before.

I press my knee between hers and they fall apart so easily, like she's been asking me for years to open her.

My fingers curl in her hair, scratching her scalp, and my teeth drag along her neck. She turns her head, giving me more room.

My hand squeezing her hip, clutching her, dragging up her skirt. The thighs I'd wanted for years suddenly in my hands. I press my leg up, pushing against her and she moans again. I lick at her shoulder.

She shifts her hips forward, pressing her center against my thigh, and I feel her throat drag in air under my lips. She cants her hips again, and I'm holding myself back from pushing against her.

Once more, and she's moaning "Oh, god" against my ear, dragging her fingers through my hair.

My cock twitches, knowing her body already. Knowing her hips and the warmth of her hands in my hair.

She pulls my head back and I can't breathe when I see her like this, this close. Her eyes dark, lips open for me, panting against my face. Her hair tangled down around her neck. And I need to lay her down. I need to kiss down her body.

She reaches up with her lips again and I can't breathe until we're kissing. I have to have more of her.

And she'll let me. She wants this.

I don't know what I've done to deserve her.

Her tongue is pressing into my mouth and I drag my hand down her neck, scraping down her chest. Need her skin. Need her breasts in my hands.

The thought rocks me. I shake as my cock presses against her. I scramble my fingers on her skirt until my fingertips have her skin. My other hand trying to unbutton her.

I'm gonna come in my trousers.

I pull my lips from her, heaving.

"You're driving me insane," I confess against her lips, pressing my forehead to hers while I concentrate on getting inside of her shirt.

"Sorry…" she whispers.

Like she doesn't know. Like she's completely blind to the sight of her own arse in these skirts and curve of her waist.

It makes me laugh. I should show her. Should touch her and show her what it's like to be me.

I reach inside her blouse, barely unbuttoned, and find soft skin covered with lace. She gasps a pleased sound and I need to be inside of her. Need to hear her gasping for me.

I heft her thigh up over my hip, bringing my hips closer.

Need to touch her.

I'll make her come. Make it good for her and she'll never want to be parted from me again.

I'll press my fingers inside of her and squeeze at her breast, kiss her breathless and thumb at her clit and make her beg me to let her come.

My fingers are dancing on the edge of her knickers, slipping under the lace, searching for the warmth. The moisture.

"I'm… I…"

I love you too.

I kiss her again, pouring my want into her, and finally touching her breast, the edge of her hard nipple beneath my fingers.

She's mumbling, trying to slow me down. But I can't stop my hands, so close. I can feel her wetness already, beckoning me closer, inside.

"… five additional."

"What?"

"It would have been 35," she whimpers.

She's not making sense. Or maybe I'm the delirious one.

"35,000."

Freezing me. Like coming up for air after drowning.

She's a virgin. Five thousand additional Galleons if she was pure.

I open my eyes to see her nervous, dazed.

"I'm…I haven't…" she mutters.

I think of Weasley. Of Krum. Fucking McLaggen and O'Connor. Scamander and Hartford.

These boys – men who wanted her. Who touched her and kissed her even.

"How…" I lean my head down on her shoulder.

I can't wrap my head around the idea of kissing her, and leaving it there. Of letting her go to bed alone after taking her to dinner.

What was she waiting for?

"I wanted you to know, before…" She trails off.

Before I took her against a wall. Before *I* took her against a wall.

She was waiting… for something. Or someone – the thought slices me – and I was about to fuck her against a wall at four in the afternoon.

I slide my hands away from her, dropping my thigh from her warm center. I can't look at her or else I'll forget everything and just slip inside of her.

"I'm sorry," I hum against her skin. "Things went too far."

I'm out of control. I never would have fucked her against a wall. Not for our first time. Or our only time. It's been too cold inside.

Compartmentalizing was not the best course. It was like a dying of thirst. Who could blame me for drinking so quickly.

I think of how this started and suddenly my hands are on her face.

"Don't leave. Don't resign." She can't leave after this. "I'll be better," I promise, panicking with her lips a breath away from mine. "We'll go back to how it was… before. I won't ignore you or treat you any differently because of this."

I don't have bricks. Or a box. And it's painful to look at her like this, knowing she can see me. All of me.

She hesitates, staring into my eyes. I try once more, "Don't leave."

She can't leave. It will be empty all the time without her.

I could go back to bookstores and giftwrap. It was a slow ache, but it was mine.

She won't let me have her. Her soul or her body. And I can't be happy just kissing her like this. I'll never stop. But it was like that before. There was no chance of it when she was my Saturday girl.

It was going to hurt either way. Might as well not drag her under.

I memorize her face like this. So close to mine. Her breath on me. And her lips… pink and abused. I touch her one last time, my thumb across her mouth.

"Okay," she whispers.

She'll stay.

I release her. And step back.

Chapter End Notes

I have been dying to ask this question for about a year now: How many of you guessed during The Right Thing to Do that the Legilimens in NYC was Queenie?

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

> This chapter so desperately wanted to be two chapters, with more flashbacks... but Y'all didn't want that! :) Enjoy.
>
> This chapter dedicated to my dear Bailey, whose birthday is today.

Wednesday, February 9, 2000

I'm waiting for her with coffee. Like I used to.

The lift doors open, and I focus on the heat under my fingertips, not tucking *her* away, but closing the lid on my desires. Like before.

I tell her about our meeting tomorrow, walk her to her door. I watch the way her eyes drink me in.

We're done. Stopped talking. I watch her eyes float across my face, and I wonder if she remembers it like I do. If she thought about me last night.

I wonder if she's ever touched herself while thinking of me.

I should leave.

My eyes drift to her neck, hoping she left the picture I painted on her skin.

But of course, she's covered the love-bites.

Back to before.

Like we didn't happen.

~*~

I wanted to visit her after lunch to discuss her proposal, go over my notes. But I can't wait even an hour. Once I'm seated in her awful chairs, sitting in front of her, I feel like I can breathe again.

We negotiate until I can give her everything she wants.

I try to make jokes about her chairs that land flat, and I watch the way her eyes flip away from me whenever she's had them on me for too long.

"I think it would help to get the Golden Snidgets case into the public view," I say. "Not a lot of people know their history, or their relation to Quidditch. We could get more eyes on their case with some assistance from the handful of Quidditch players we know."

I'm already regretting bringing up the Weasel, but then—

"Oh! I wonder if I could get in contact with Viktor!"

Viktor. What joy.

"Krum could be useful, too."

I try to relax my jaw, discussing the promotional campaign with her more, when she's suddenly bringing up Rolf Scamander as well. I have to remind myself that neither of them have been in bed with her.

She thanks me as I leave her office, and I guess that's enough.

I cross the floor to find Blaise waiting for me at my door. I nod to him. He follows me in and shuts the door.

"You've returned to us."

"Pardon?" I sit in my chair.

"You were gone a for a week. And now you're back."

He's being witty. Like my Occlumency was a vacation. Or a death I've returned from.

I'm not amused.

"Yes," I say.

"What prompted your return," he says, fiddling with the papers on my desk, eyeing me.

"It wasn't sustainable," I say, dismissing him.

I can't share with him again. I can't talk about kissing her like we'll be doing it again.

~*~

Friday, February 11, 2000

I put several of the interns on researching the guest list for the Governor's Ball. When one of them – Tommy? – comes in with their analysis, I find several people who we could connect to, who Granger could impress.

Dr. Henry Flanders – Attending Healer at St. Mungo's
-Expert in magical neurology, memory, motor function.
-Hogwarts class of 1965 – Ravenclaw
-Oxford class of 1970 – Experimental Psychology

The list goes on. Tommy is very detailed.

But my eyes linger on *memory.*

Then my door is opening, and Granger is stomping in.

Merlin. What have I done now.

She shuts the door. And my fingers curl on my notes. "Yes, Granger?"

"I just had a very interesting date."

I look up at her again. "Oh?" I hadn't thought when I'd given her coffee this morning that she looked so smashing because she had a lunch date.

Why would she tell me this.

"With Katya."

Oh.

"Oh." I look back down to the list. "I didn't know she was in town."

I hear a whispered *"Silencio"* and my heart screams.

"Don't—Please don't silence the room."

"But I want to yell at you." Fuck, she's so cute.

I breathe deep. "If I know the room is silenced and the door is shut, this will be harder for me."

What a mess. I hate this "openness."

She looks at me like it hasn't occurred to her that I want to fuck her into my desk. She blushes. And I feel disgusting for saying it out loud.

She counters her spell, and turns back to me, still fuming.

"Where are the books?"

"Books?"

"The books—!" she yells, then whispers, "The giftwrapped books."

Of all the things I've done in my life… all the lies I told, all the people I've hurt… I should have known she'd lose her shit over those books.

"If they were gifts," I try, "then I'm sure I gave them away—"

"Katya never received a book. She told me today," she says. "I giftwrapped books for your *girlfriend* and now she's *not* your *girlfriend* and never *was* and she never received the books! I want to know what happened to them."

So, Katya told her about the ruse. The way she keeps hissing the word "girlfriend" reminds me of our bookshop. Of the way she used to read about my dates in the paper the next day.

"You're truly upset about those books?"

"Yes!" she screams, and then hisses lower, "I'm *livid* about the books."

"Did I not purchase the books?"

"Yes, you did—"

"So, after the transaction, was I not free to do with them whatever I please?"

She looks like she wants to strangle me. And although the fantasy has crossed my mind—

"I spent valuable time and effort wrapping up those books for *Katya*, and now I hear that *Katya* never received those books. So, I want to know what the point was!"

Her logic is unsound. Which means her emotions are in the way. Which means she *feels* something.

"I'm sorry," I say, not sorry. "I was under the impression that gift-wrapping at Cornerstone was a service provided to the customer. I wasn't aware one needed to declare the recipient upon requesting giftwrapping."

Her jaw drops open, like I've cursed her cat. "You know what, Malfoy? Now that you mention it, giftwrapping is *not* a free service. It actually costs two sickles." She leans down against my desk and I have to force myself to stay seated. "I had forgotten about it because no one else has ever been *idiotic* enough to ask for a *book* to be wrapped!"

Her eyes are hot, and burning into me. She wants me to fight her back, wants me to test her. But if I push too far I'll forget myself.

I reach for my coin purse. "Two sickles, you say?"

"Don't you *dare* try to *pay* me."

"I'm not paying you, I'm paying Cornerstone."

"I don't *want* you to pay Cornerstone!"

"Then what do you want?!"

I can feel the fever running up my chest, into my neck, like lava about to overflow.

Her chest is heaving, her eyes on me. And I'm begging her to say it. Tell me you want me.

She steps back from my desk, like she knows we're in dangerous waters.

"I want to know what the point was."

But instead it's me who has to admit it. She won't move until I do, I realize.

I breath into my mind, breathing through the cracks in my bricks. "It was a way to spend three extra minutes with you."

Her eyes are so deep, waiting for me to take it back. Waiting for me to ruin it.

She blushes, like I've complimented her. And I suppose I have.

I feel my skin buzzing, my mind open. If she continued, if she asked me something else I'd answer her.

It hurts. I pull back.

"Anything else, Granger?"

She stammers, pulling away from me, looking at her shoes.

"See you tomorrow," I say, looking back at the guest list, letters blurring together, keeping myself from begging her stay, but she's confused.

I look up, reminding her of the Governors' Ball.

"I wasn't… I'm not going."

Not going? "Did you not receive the memo?"

"It was an offer, not a necessity!" she hisses.

I could shake her. "As a Senior Consultant and one of the major forces behind Malfoy Consulting, you are expected to be there."

Her hands go to her hips, and I know whatever comes next is going to be good.

"Don't you mean as the *Golden Girl*, I'm expected to be there?"

She doesn't disappoint. "Excuse me?"

"I was hired to be Senior Consultant over Non-Wizard Relations, not the face of Malfoy Consulting Group."

"What are you going on about, Granger—?"

"I know about Wentworth," she interrupts.

I stare at her, trying to catch up. She accuses me of using her, using her name to land Wentworth. A conversation over Butterbeer floats through my memories, and I suppose I did

mention her to Wentworth when he asked me for a reason to sign on. But that's… that's not…

"I might have said I was offering you the position but I don't remember telling Wentworth you had signed on."

"But you didn't—!" She remembers to keep her voice down. "But you didn't offer me the position. You toasted a champagne glass at me."

"Same thing."

"Listen, Malfoy," she begins, and my eye twitches at my surname again. "I'm happy to defend you to those that don't believe in you, or write letters of recommendation. I'm happy to stand up for this company and what it represents. And I'm happy to help you make a mark in this world, but don't you dare assume anything about me without asking."

She dips her chin at the end. Like she's made her point.

She thinks I *assume* things about her. About her value and potential. And I'm only angry that she doesn't assume them herself.

She thinks I want her for her name? For her titles? She thinks I want the Golden Girl by my side, when all I've ever wanted was her.

I refuse to stay seated like some child she can scold.

"The only thing I *assumed* about you, Granger, was how ridiculously undervalued you were at the Ministry." I round my desk, moving toward her. And she does the smart thing, placing a chair between us. "I *assumed* the Ministry would destroy you like it destroys all dreamers. And I *assumed* that you could do better."

"You came to me with the werewolf project, knowing I couldn't resist—"

"I came to you with a project to lure you to me, yes." I step closer, only the chair between us. "To make you see what you could be capable of. What *we* could be capable of." I'm stumbling too close to the truth, but I can't pull back now. "But I don't give a fuck about the werewolves."

She trembles, eyes on fire. This fucking chair. I should be pressed against her already.

She mumbles, trying to keep her moral high ground. "You... You shouldn't have told people I'd be heading up this branch without knowing for sure."

I want to laugh at her. It was never about the branch.

"I *created* this branch for you," I hum, eyes dipping over her neck and chest as she draws ragged air. "There would be no Non-Wizard Relations branch of Malfoy Consulting without you." She swallows and her throat flutters. "It was tailor made for you and only you. To give you exactly what you wanted."

And I wonder if I give too much away, but then she licks her lips.

"Next time," she whispers, "ask me if I want it."

And there's so many things I want to ask. So many things I already *should* have asked.

Can I kiss you.

Can I touch you here.

Can we continue.

I wonder if she feels as out of control as I do. She needs me to ask. She needs to give.

Like I never asked about fucking her against a wall. I wasn't going to wait for her to give it to me.

Ask her.

And a breathy New York accent swirls inside my head. *Maybe because you weren't the one askin'.*

"I would like for you to come with me to the Governors' Ball."

There. That wasn't so hard, sugar.

I continue, "There are several people attending who will not only be great connections for Malfoy Consulting, but also for you personally."

She looks at me like I've asked her out on Valentine's Day. And I hope that's what she's thinking. Terrified that's what she's thinking.

"I- I have nothing to wear."

Relief shivers over me. "I'm sure we can get Pansy to whip something up." I smile, walking to my desk so I can send her an owl.

I suddenly can't wait to hear what Pansy has to say about this development—

Until she reminds me that Pansy is away in Italy. I'm sure she told me, but…

"Fuck. You honestly have nothing at home?"

"I mean, if it was socially acceptable to wear the same dress I wore to New Year's…"

She chuckles, and I remember her skin in that dress. The way the fabric draped over her hips, teasing. Could she wear it again, and be on my arm? My hand on her back as I weave her through the crowd, fingers tracing patterns on her skin.

I look away, trying to remember what we're talking about.

I ask her about that dress. She thinks maybe it was from Desrosiers. Luckily, Narcissa Black has an account there.

I'm at the fireplace on one knee calling for Madame Desrosiers. She pops through, making small talk before I ask if she remembers styling Hermione Granger.

Her eyes brighten, and I tell her I need it done by tomorrow. She doesn't bat an eye, knowing that I'll be paying double for it. I tell her she can make it similar to the white dress, and she says in French, "You want more décolletage, no?"

I chuckle and shake my head at her, telling her to do what she thinks I'd like the best. She winks at me. And asks me for the color.

I say gold before I can stop myself.

She sends me kisses in goodbye, and I stand to make a note for Carrie to follow up on the bill on Monday.

"They'll send your dress directly to you by tomorrow afternoon. It's close enough to your New Year's dress without being too close."

"Send me the bill," she says.

I laugh. She would never pay this much for a dress. And yet the feeling of buying her something, of making her feel special… I could do that every day.

But she would never accept that from me.

But Pansy gets to give her things, and pretend she gets nothing in return.

"What is different about your partnership with Pansy?" I ask. "She is riding on your coattails just as much."

"It's completely different."

I finish my note and look up at her. "How?"

"She… I'm getting something in return. It's helping her image as well as my own."

Getting something in return. And I wonder how much more I can give her before there's nothing left of me.

"So, you're not getting enough from our relationship, Granger?" I can't believe she needs more from me. More to prove myself. To prove that she can have anything she asks. "I'll give you the Snidgets," I say. "Let's move up the court date."

I've surprised her. She's stammers her way through a response and I give her another.

"Or the Muggle-Born Integration Project? It's approved."

We'll figure out the logistics later. Now the only thing I care about is how speechless she is, how astonished she is that I can give her the things that she wants.

I'm in over my head when I say, "Or whatever pet project you want. It's yours. Fully supported."

She's breathless, and I imagine this is the equivalent of giving a woman a diamond necklace, and then a box of matching earrings, and then the tennis bracelet. But Granger will never want those things, as much as I want to give them to her. To see her wear them every day while women look on in jealousy and men's eyes slide over her sparkling body.

My feet have carried me closer to her. And she watches me with open lips.

"But you'll need to realize that it's not Draco Malfoy they'll want to see at these galas and fundraisers and dinner parties. It's Hermione Granger, activist, war hero, Golden Girl. You'll need to use that celebrity to get what you want."

I'm in front of her now. And I almost ask her if we can continue. If I can have her again.

She blinks up at me with thick lashes, and in a low vixen's voice, says, "You may need to teach me how."

The things I could teach her.

"We can start tomorrow night," I hum.

She nods, looking at my lips, like we're sharing thoughts. Like she's also imagining my mouth between her legs, *teaching* her.

Teaching Hermione Granger. What a quick learner she'd be. Like with everything, she'd excel far past my instructions. Creating new ways to make me come, new ways to cross my eyes and shake my legs.

My hands curl in my pockets. I swallow and step back from her.

"Your Bulgarian will be there tomorrow." I watch her brows raise in surprise.

"Viktor? At the Governors' Ball?"

"Mm-hm. You can talk to him about the Snidgets. Try to get his support."

She looks down, brain working. "Wonderful."

"A few other people who I think you could get on your side for any of your causes," I say. "I can introduce you."

"Okay."

And I can't wait to roam the ballroom with her at my side, meeting people and whispering in her ear.

"See you at seven."

After she's left, I call Madame Desrosiers again, asking for a redesign of my suit for tomorrow.

~*~

Saturday, February 12, 2000

Blaise looks ridiculous. But he's confident that he'll get laid tonight, so I guess that's all he needs.

The ballroom is luminescent, silks and lights all coming together beautifully. Skeeter has already gotten her claws into me, but after some expert flirting, I escaped without truly answering her question about if I had a date tonight.

I don't know.

I've spotted several potential clients that I'll want to talk to this evening, but my hands are sweating, so I don't want to introduce myself now.

I'm waiting for her.

I'm fiddling with my timepiece when I feel the need to look up, like there's a string tugging on me whenever she's near.

A witch in a gold dress stands at the top of the stairs and I glide to the bottom of them. She smiles at me, gathering her dress to descend.

Madame Desrosiers deserves a tip.

I drink her in, ankles appearing under the hem, soft silk slipping over her curves, a bodice fitted and open, delving neckline drawing my eyes to her delicate breasts. I finally move back to her eyes and she blushes.

Eyes on me.

Until a bulb flashes, and Rita Skeeter has drawn her from me. She's four steps away, one foot off the stair, and Rita asks her if she has a date tonight.

She looks to me, anxious.

And maybe this wasn't the start of something. Maybe if she had to define it, it wouldn't be a date.

That's fine. It's more than fine. What we have is more than fine.

I step away so Skeeter can't see me. Can't connect us again. I'll find her later. We don't have to walk the party together, as a team, as a couple.

"I will refuse to answer that incredibly invasive question, Rita, but if you'd like to photograph me walking away with Draco Malfoy, feel free," she sings.

I look up at her, heart pounding, and meet her smirk as she glides down the last few stairs, slipping her hand into mine as the camera flashes.

Like she's mine.

I steer her away from Skeeter, towards the champagne, lifting two glasses.

She's smiling softly, content.

I should compliment her dress. Her hair. I lean in to tell her she looks beautiful, even though that word is meaningless with her looking so good.

And Horace Slughorn is suddenly here with us, splashing his brandy on the marble. He kisses her cheek, and I lift a brow.

"Miss Granger! You are a *vision*, my dear!" To me: "And my favorite Slytherin – don't tell Mr. Zabini."

He chuckles, and I shake his hand. "I wouldn't dream of it."

He proceeds to "collect" us into his Slug Club, and I bite my tongue to remind him I refused to join in sixth year. I need him tonight.

And just like that, he's guiding us toward a woman who works exclusively with the small werewolf population in Germany.

I press my hand to her back, like I used to. Lower, much lower than before, and her muscles twitch under the silk.

From there, Slughorn escorts us over to someone else. If I don't recognize their name, then I must have decided that they aren't worth knowing. But Granger is glowing under the introductions, shaking hands with the vampire bravely and asking her own questions without Slughorn.

I watch the way her mouth moves, her teeth white and flashing. I let my palm drift higher as she shifts, finally kissing the skin of her back. I watch the shiver run her shoulders, skin pulling tight as my fingers brush lightly against the top of her hip.

Like she's mine.

She licks her lips when I do it again, eyes concentrated on the vampire, and I dip my eyes to her breasts to watch her nipples pull tight, aching.

I pull my eyes away, smiling at whoever we're talking to, feeling my cock harden, aching.

Slughorn steers us away, and I'm about to separate us from him to find a quiet corner where I can ask if she minds if I suck on her neck for a while when he runs us into one of the people I intended to find tonight.

Rhett Buckworth. Philanthropist. Retired politician. But most importantly, Townsend's Hogwarts-rival-turned-reluctant-friend.

Thank you, Tommy, for this most helpful information.

Slughorn does the introductions, and I don't even flinch when Buckworth calls me "Lucius's boy," because I'm so looking forward to this.

"Tell me, Mr. Buckworth, do you still keep in touch with Geoffrey Townsend?" I ask. And I feel her look to me in question. He confirms, and I say, "Granger just had a meeting with him last week."

She blinks up at me, pretty eyes trying to figure me out.

I'm *teaching* you, Granger.

I navigate her through the conversation, even daring to press on her back, pushing her to talk more. She follows my lead, playing innocent so well. Because she is – she has no idea what we're doing.

Buckworth pledges half, and a fruit basket.

"I do love those chocolate-covered strawberries, Mr. Buckworth." I smirk and shake his hand. He laughs boisterously.

She's blinking at the two of us. I run my thumb across the dip in her back. *Ten points to Gryffindor*.

"I have no idea what just happened," she whispers.

Slughorn distracts him for a moment, and I lean in, breathing in the scent of her, brushing my lips across her ear.

"You just secured your fundraising for your first project, Granger."

"I… I didn't do anything, though."

"You were perfect."

I'm about to turn us away so I can whisper more praise into her neck when I catch sight of an older gentleman hanging about the edge of the dance floor.

Dr. Flanders.

I don't take my eyes off him as I whisper to her, "I need to speak with Horace about something, but this gentleman here"—I gesture to my right—"is the youngest Hogwarts governor. He's also Muggle-born."

She looks up at me, understanding.

I introduce myself to the governor, leading to her introduction, and as I leave her I can't help but dance my fingers across her skin, hopefully burning the memory of me there.

"Horace," I say, taking him side. "Do you know a Dr. Flanders? He was at Hogwarts in—"

"Yes! Yes! Henry! I think he's here tonight!"

"I would love to speak to him."

And Slughorn delivers me to Dr. Flanders, leaving us to talk in private.

I spend thirty minutes with Dr. Flanders, explaining the case without giving particulars. He is a very optimistic healer, but tries not to show it. We make a date for him to come into the office to discuss more.

I can feel my skin humming when we part. If I can give her this…

No. That's not what this is about. It's… the right thing.

I found a solution to a problem, and how she thanks me for solving the problem is not the focus.

I spin to find her among the crowd, and it's easy to do. She glows.

I move to claim her again, but then I see the person she's talking to is Krum.

He's found her unattended. I had hoped I could prevent that.

I grab another glass of champagne while he smiles down at her, watching her mouth. She touches him – placing her hand on the broad plane of his shoulder. And I roll my own back, standing tall.

I pace the edge of the dance floor, watching them. Watching her gesture and smile, her eyes blazing. And watching his dull attention rest on her chest. She can't be daft enough to not notice.

There are couples on the dance floor. And I need her to look at me again.

I pace to the violinist as they finish the minuet, and I ask him politely if he would consider the French Waltz. I slip him ten Galleons. He sniffs in annoyance, but nods.

I cruise the edge of the dancers, watching as her eyes light up at the strings. I wonder if she still remembers it. Krum holds out his hand, making her laugh, and I watch like a predator as they join the circle of couples. I grab a blonde girl – fuck, maybe it's the same blonde girl from five years ago, who knows – and flash my smile at her.

"Do you know the French Waltz, love?"

She nods greedily as I force us into a position two couples away from them.

I watch as Krum bows to her, forgetting myself and bowing quickly to the girl. Granger curtseys back at him, a smooth dip of her legs that flows with the silk on her hips.

She slips into his arms, smiling up at him, and I pull the girl into me, waiting.

Waiting.

After an eternity, she spins out, landing in front of me. I smirk at her.

She stops dead where she is, and I know that she remembers. Maybe she plays it over in her head like I do, wishing we could have been partners all night.

I bow, keeping my eyes on hers. She chuckles, and I smile back at her.

She curtseys, like she's been practicing.

"What are you laughing at, Granger?"

Her eyes are mine again, only mine, and she says, "Coincidences."

I hold my hand up to hers, wondering if she'll touch me. Wondering if she's learned her lesson about touching me.

She places her hand a breath away and watches my face as I spin around her.

"I don't believe in coincidences." My heart thunders. Do I dare?

"Oh, really?" She smirks at me, shaking her head like I couldn't possibly know what she's thinking.

"I'm exactly where I planned to be," I say. "Just as I had planned to be here the last time we danced to this song."

And it feels like the brick wall in my mind hasn't crumbled. It feels like I've climbed it. Looking down from the top at what my life could have been.

She understands me. The way her mouth opens, and her body freezes. I know she understands me. She understands that even then I wanted this.

I smirk at her and spin away, not bothering to return to my partner, just watching Granger from the side.

She looks for me. She spins in a circle and then Krum is there. Even then she looks for me.

I smile, watching her want me.

But then she's stumbling, stepping on toes, and I watch her chest heaving.

And the smile melts away from my lips.

She's… terrified. She's hyperventilating. Because of me.

I pace the floor, closer to her, and watch as she thanks Viktor and moves away from the dance floor. No longer looking for me. Running from me?

Because I confessed. Because I opened myself and she saw who I've been for five years.

I chase her.

She's clicking away down a quiet hallway that I recognize from when I was here with Mother.

She speeds up when she hears me. But I can't stop. If she's afraid of this—I have to fix it. I have to go back.

I shouldn't have—

I can't lose her—

"Granger."

She finally stops. She won't face me. I can hear her breathing.

"I didn't mean to… scare you or…"

I push my hand through my hair. I'll say I was joking.

Wouldn't that have been funny, Granger? If five years ago I wanted to dance with you so badly that I forced my way in, that I took it from you?

"When did this start for you? Please, tell me." Softly into the air.

I can still take it back.

What, Granger? You never thought about me? Even once? And a wink at her.

"Fourth year," leaves my lips. Like Veritaserum seeping into my veins.

I shouldn't have danced with her. Now, or then. I shouldn't have assumed I could steal her attention from Krum. From someone she wanted. I don't deserve her eyes on me.

And then she turns around, looking at me.

"I win." She smirks.

Something she's won. Her eyes are kind as I try to piece together her question.

When did it start? She's won because it's been longer for her…

She steps into me, coming closer, offering herself to me.

Have we been dancing with each other all these years, without knowing?

"Oh, you stupid bint," I say, reaching for her, and she smiles against my mouth as I kiss her.

Just the same as before. Perfect.

My lips press into hers, finding a slower rhythm than before. A slow dance, as she wraps her arms around my shoulders, hands sliding behind my neck, and my fingers slip to her hips, spreading wide across the silk.

She presses her chest into mine.

I have to touch more of her.

She's surrounding me, pulling me under. And there's no use fighting the current.

I slide my hands down, lower, letting her cheeks fill my palms, delicious silk between us.

She lets me.

I walk us to the sitting room, holding her against the door while I fiddle with the handle. She breathes against my neck, and holds my head close.

The door gives and she's gone for a second as we fall inside, like teenagers looking for a closet.

I shut the door, turning us to press her against the wood. I feel her breasts against my chest. Soft and pressed flat. Will she let me see them? Touch them. Taste them.

I trace her side, finding her ribs against the silk as she breathes. I press my head to hers, and stare into her, pour into her my thoughts and wants.

I could stay like this forever if this is all she'll give me.

She's looking into my eyes, waiting. Then she's checking the room, behind me.

"Did you know this sitting room was here?"

I roll my eyes. "Granger, *you* led me down this hall, not the other way around." I need to kiss her again. "But, yes, I've been here before. My mother and I had tea on those chairs just last month."

"I miss your mother."

"Let's talk about her later, shall we?" I tease, and she smiles. A true smile.

Like I know the secret to her lips. How to make her smile.

She kisses me, pulling me down to her, and she drags her fingers through my hair, sending shivers down my back. I need more of her.

I reach for her arse again, because she already let me do that. My fingers squeeze her close.

And I imagine slipping inside of her, my hands on her cheeks, pulling them close to me on every thrust. Or bending her over one of these couches, and watching my cock slip in and out, hands on her arse, pushing her down into arm of the couch.

I pull my lips from hers, letting my thoughts drift back into place.

I can't have that.

She made it clear.

So, she'll need to tell me what I can have or else I'll just take it from her.

She told me I should ask.

"Tell me what you want."

I slide against the silk, dragging one hand over her breast, asking.

"Everything," she moans.

No, no, no, no, no.

Stupid, stupid girl. Why would you do that.

I squeeze my eyes tight, breathing harshly.

If she really—

If I can touch her—

Taste—

Maybe even press inside—

If she'll let me please her, if she'll let me drag pleasure from her body, if she'll let me watch as she comes, listen to her moan and maybe my name—

Maybe she'll know it's me.

Not against a wall again. Not like this.

I crush her to me and lift her. She gasps and the laugh – the giggle – she whispers into my ear shoots to my chest and I'm too warm.

I drop her down on the chaise, and the feeling of her fingers on my shoulders, begging me to stay with her…

I'm too warm. A fever in my chest.

I sit up on knees, pulling my jacket off to toss somewhere when I catch sight of her, lying in front of me, waiting for me to return to her. In silk.

Her hair.

Her eyes.

Her breath.

I can do this. I can make this good for her. I can make her moan and come apart with my hands, and maybe she'll let me do it again.

Maybe she'll ache for me, and in another few weeks I can offer myself to her again.

I grip the back of the chaise, and press closer to her, watching her eyes darken. My right hand on her waist, ready to carve her body into my memory, and I whisper against her lips, "Tell me when to stop."

I bring our lips together again, keeping it soft. Slow. Tasting her delicately. My hand drifts up her ribcage, fingers searching for the swell, the lift of her breast against the silk. I concentrate on the handful of her, curl my fingers into her, and find her peak with my thumb. Hard and pebbled through her bra and the dress.

She wheezes into my mouth – "Oh, god, Draco."

My name on her breath, like she's begging me to touch her. Like she knows it's my hand on her, my thumb rolling her nipple, my body hovering over hers.

Like she might belong to me.

My jaw clenches with the desire. She yelps. I bit her.

Fuck.

"I'm sorry." Her lips are too precious. I move to her neck. Skin I can tear into.

I suck the skin into my mouth. The same place I bruised her earlier this week – and was that only days ago?

I taste the makeup there. And set to licking it off. My hand palms her again, thumb pushing against her.

And she touches my waist, both hands on my sides. She doesn't have to. She can just lay back and feel.

"More. Please, Draco."

Begging for it.

Begging *me.*

And I lose my breath, wondering at her voice against my ear while I'm inside of her, while she shivers around me, *begging* me to fuck her, asking me for more. Asking me for

something only I can give to her.

She presses her knee to my hip. She wants more.

I stretch my legs out, remembering this from years before. Remembering rubbing and hips rolling. The sensation of sex without being inside the heat.

She sighs against my ear when my torso rolls down to meet hers. Her hips open, cradling me like we fit together. I feel my cock respond to the heat below me. I feel her breasts against my chest again.

"Better?"

"Yes, god," she moans.

I look at her, her eyes fluttering shut, her lips parted and panting.

I press our mouths together, wet kisses between shallow breaths.

Her hips jump, pressing tight to mine. Perfect. Perfect girl.

She does it again, on purpose now, like she knows I could come in my trousers, like she wants me to.

Like she wants me to rock against her slowly, pressing my cock against her knickers, and give her the friction she needs—

I slither between us to rub at her breast, to tug at her nipple.

She moans into my mouth, and I delve between her thighs, pressing my cock tight to her. She squeaks and I can feel her thighs around me, her arms holding my chest to her, nails digging into my shirt.

"Tell me when to stop," I beg her, and then I'm fucking her slowly, the fabric between us, my hand torturing her breast, my hipbones digging into hers. I show her what our bodies could do together.

And she meets my thrust with a moan, and I feel my balls tighten. It's too close. I can't –

I can't—

I need to—

I lift off of her, my cock missing her already. I stare down at her, swallowing hard while my right hand finds her hip, silk already pooling around her waist. I follow the line of her lace towards her center, and I wonder if I'll be able to finish her off before I come in my trousers.

I kiss her neck.

Maybe she'll let me use my mouth.

I touch her. Finally. Only lace between us. She bites my ear, and I gasp into her hair. I press against her again, feeling her wet for me.

"God, please, please, please." Her voice washing over my ear. And I force myself to go slow in case she wants to stop.

"Tell me – Tell me when to stop." I'm almost begging her now. I really should have asked at the beginning how far we'll go. Instead of waiting for her stop me.

I'm rubbing circles against her perfect cunt now, and she mumbles, moaning.

"Why would you stop? What's wrong?"

"If you want me to stop…" I pull back to look down at her, a blush running down her neck. Her eyes black. "If you want to stop—" She has to tell me.

"Why the fuck would we stop!" she screams.

And I feel like I missed something.

"Because… because I'm a virgin?" she asks. "Is that why?"

Yes? I look down at her, wondering if she doesn't remember.

"That's why you stopped us. Last time."

"*I* stopped us?" She pushes at me and I sit back. She sits up and screeches, "*You* stopped us!"

"*You* said you had never – So I pulled away!"

"Yes, I *remember*," like it offends her. "But I never asked you to stop!"

That is… *definitely* not what happened. But am I to argue with her at a time like this.

I'd asked her, minutes ago. *Tell me what you want*.

And she'd said, *Everything*.

But she doesn't know what *Everything* means to me.

I could be inside of her. I could fuck her into this couch like she was mine. And it still wouldn't be my Everything.

"If you don't tell me to stop," I hum between us, giving her one last chance, "then I'm going to take you, Granger. Right here on this chaise lounge."

I wait. I wait for her to revise her wishes.

"What are you waiting for."

I shove her back, my hands going to her chest, needing her breasts, needing to see her, feel her taste her.

She had her fucking chance.

I rip the dress down the middle until I can see her lace bra, licking my lips at the way she gasps.

"What are you—?"

"I'll buy you a thousand dresses," I promise, leaning down to take her mouth.

She pants against me as I suck and kiss down her jaw to her chest, barely pausing before attaching my lips to her breast. She groans the most delicious sound, and I know I have to hear it again.

She holds my head to her chest, and I lick and suck at the lace, moving my hand under her dress again, sighing when she shivers.

I slip under her knickers, savoring every moment. Her hips jump against my hand when I find her clit.

My tongue and teeth on her chest, and she clutches me closer.

She wants me. She wants me inside of her, pumping into her, making love to her.

I rub harder on her, listening to her breath as she pants. I look up at her. Her face tilted back, eyes squeezed shut.

"Look at me."

Her eyes drift open and her thighs twitch around my hand. I slip down and press one finger inside of her, consumed by her heat, swirling harder on her clit, and I watch her eyes the moment she climaxes, just before they roll back and her hands grip the chaise.

She moans, her neck stretching, her legs squeezing my hand. And I rub large circles against her as she comes down.

She looks at me again, eyes hazy. And I would do it all again. I wouldn't change a single moment in our pasts just to keep this.

She sits up, pushing me off her. And I wonder if that's all.

But then she's pulling her ragged dress off her shoulders and lifting her arms until her bra is off. I have to brace myself when I see her naked chest for the first time. And then she starts unbuttoning my shirt.

Single-minded determination. Like brewing a potion. She slips each button through, until she stops.

And I realize she's seen it. *Sectumsempra*.

She tries to touch the scar, but I snatch her hands off.

Don't pity me, Granger. Not after all this.

I deserve every scar I have. Every mark. And I'd do it all again.

She looks up at me like she's done something wrong, so I kiss the inside of her wrist. Then again. And again.

She attacks me with her mouth, and we both chuckle at the pain. She struggles underneath me, and I realize too late she's trying to get naked. She slips out from under me, standing and shoving the silk down around her thighs, to her ankles. She takes off each shoe with a balance that has her stomach muscles pulling tight, and she turns back to face me as I take in her body.

Her thighs. I've wanted them around me. Wanted them clutching my waist, or straddling me in a chair.

Her hips. Perfect curve from the top of her legs to her waist, and I almost ask her to turn around so I can see her arse.

Her ribs and breasts. Pulled straight from my imagination.

"Take off your trousers."

I look to her mouth, making sure it really was her who said it. She blushes, and I find it captivating. I have to slow down.

"I mean…" she mutters, "that *is* where we're going with this, yes?"

She's suddenly nervous. And I love her.

I stand, squeezing into the space in front of her, and I can tell she wants to step back, but meets my challenge anyway.

She breathes deep, and her chest almost touches mine.

I reach for my belt and trousers, and each time I unbutton my knuckles brushes her stomach. I work slowly, watching her eyes, watching her nipples pull tight.

I drop my trousers, and I can't even plan my next move before she's pushing me, shoving me back and climbing on top of me.

Finally in my lap, legs on either side of me. And she's aggressive and in control. She pops the buttons on my shirt. She forces my head back so she can press her tongue into my mouth. She shoves my shirt down my shoulders.

I keep my hands soft on her hips, not trusting myself yet.

She scoots closer, opening her thighs, and rocks against me before I know what's happening.

My cock pressed tight to her, and I'm trying to hold it together when she does it again.

My hands hold her still, begging her please, please don't.

She chases me again, hands in my hair and my hips snap to hers, ready to drag aside her knickers, pull my cock out of my trunks, and thrust up into her.

I hold us both still, eyes squeezed shut.

Not like that.

"Draco, please."

I hold her close as I turn us so she's on her back again. I count to ten before I can look at her, her lips puffing air against my face and her eyes sinking into me.

"Are you sure."

Because I won't stop. Not once I'm inside.

She murmurs a prayer of yeses.

And then I'm pulling her knickers down, listening to her breath as I push my finger inside of her, then another. Preparing her in a way I'd never needed to with Pansy. Never even asked who'd come before me.

She begs me to just begin, but I tell her to trust me. We have to do it this way.

I touch her clit again, and she grabs my hair, kissing me hard, begging me. And that must be enough, right?

I push my trunks away, hold onto her hip, and press inside of her.

And the centuries spin.

There's a dance playing behind my eyes, and I try to listen to the melody but all I hear is her breath.

I'm inside of her. Fully. And my jaw opens in bliss.

I dare to look down at her, and she's staring at me like I've given her the moon.

"Okay?" I ask.

She nods, and I start.

And there's nothing worse than the pace I set for her. Nothing so torturous as feeling her heat swallowing me every time, her walls so tight and unused, begging me to just say put long enough to get to know my size.

So, I move slow. And I kiss her, eyes closed and tongue insistent.

I try to think of anything I can do to make her feel like this. To let her understand this.

Pressing my hand to her chest again, thrumming over her, I twirl her nipple between my fingers. She gasps into my mouth. Her nails drag across my shoulders.

I slide down her waist, still unbelieving that she's naked under me. This skin is mine.

I swivel down her hips, pulling her knee higher and when I sink deeper into her, I hear her squeak.

I close my eyes and think about a slow rhythm, her knee at my chest, her air between us.

Opening my eyes, and I look into hers and ask, "Can I go faster?"

She says yes, but I don't believe her, so I show her what I want to do, snapping forward. She blinks quickly and says yes again.

I grab her hip, pressing my forehead to hers, and bring our chests together. And I fuck her the way I want to.

Not too fast. Just quick enough to feel her walls drag against my cock before I push back in. I can hear myself sighing on every exhale.

She's watching me. And I want so badly for her to like this. To maybe want this again.

I fit my hand between us, her clit bumping my fingers on every thrust of my hips.

She squeezes me softly, and I can't think. My vision whites before coming back, and *Hermione* is underneath me still. She squeezes me again, this time on purpose, and I retaliate by rubbing hard on her clit, hips jumping faster.

She's so tight. And her breath on my face, gasping as I fuck her.

My fingers curl into her hair, squeezing my fist and tugging her neck open to my mouth.

I'm almost there. My face in her fucking hair.

I grunt into her neck, snapping my hips into her, rubbing her clit with the vain hope that—

And she moans, chest arching into me.

Come on, lover. I kiss her cheek, and return to her neck.

She groans, and I pull back to watch her come while I'm inside of her, pumping into her.

She drifts back to earth, and when she opens her eyes and smiles at me, I can't think of anything but coming. I have to come.

When everything tightens inside of me, and I groan, shaking, and pouring into her, I have one hand on her hip, one fisted in her curls.

I breathe against her chest, waiting for the world to come back.

But it's just us.

I feel her ribs under me, expanding, trying to breathe against my weight. I drop one last kiss to the top of her breast, tasting the sweat on her skin, and then I struggle to pull out of her and sit up.

Debauched. Fucked into the couch. Hair wild, lips smothered, and smiling at me.

I find my trunks and trousers. I'm still catching my breath as I slide my shirt on.

This is what we do, right? We get dressed and we go home?

She's fiddling with her gold dress, fabric specially crafted by Desrosiers, making a *reparo* very difficult.

I'll buy her another one.

I transfigure it into a robe for her. She grabs her shoes and I take her to the fireplace.

"If you're planning to go back out there," she says, "you'll need a look in the mirror first."

I watch her face, trying to decide if this was right. Usually people could just fall sleep after, or went home.

Pansy always just went back to her dorm.

"I'll make excuses for you," I say.

She looks up at me, waiting. And I lean in and kiss her.

She steps through the Floo and is gone.

And I think that was the wrong thing to do.

I stare into the flames, wondering if I chase after her.

But we… have an understanding now, yes?

We have feelings for each other.

Don't we?

Did we say it?

My head hurts. I need Blaise.

I conjure a mirror and get myself back together, missing her lipstick the moment it disappears from my skin.

I return to the Ball, shaking hands with a few people, searching for Blaise.

Half an hour later when Slughorn tells me he left, I head to the fireplaces.

I step through to his posh little flat that he bought when he moved back to the U.K. calling his name.

He appears from down the hall, in a robe, holding his wand.

"What?" He looks me up and down searching for injuries.

"I had sex with her. What do I do now?"

"Who?"

I glare at him. "Who do you think?" I sit on his couch.

He scratches his jaw. "It better not be Melody, 'cause she's in the next room."

I narrow my eyes at him.

"Zabini," I hiss. "You signed a *contract*."

His eyes widen. "What the fuck are you talking about?! You just fucked Hermione Granger!"

We stare at each other for a moment.

"Oh, Merlin—"

"Shit! Draco!" He jumps on me.

"I know—"

"You fucked Hermione Granger?"

"I did."

"Will wonders never cease!" He bounces on top me, knees pressing into my stomach.

"So…" A female voice from the hallway. "Are we done for tonight?"

"Get the fuck outta here, Melody!" he yells. "There's something important happening out here!"

Chapter 19

Saturday, July 8, 1995

Father is still at Borgin and Burkes, bartering and intimidating, so I snuck off, finding my way through the crowds to Cornerstone. I haven't seen it since last summer, but Morty smiles when he catches sight of me.

"Young Mr. Malfoy. Welcome."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hindes. How is your summer?"

Morty pushes the mint bowl to me, and I pluck up one, twisting the foil. "Excellent, excellent. Hogwarts treating you well?" His brows dip, and then he whispers, "I did hear about that poor Diggory boy. Did you know him well?"

I shrug. "Not well, no. It's a bit of a fright really, but I hear things like this happen in the Triwizard Tournament all the time." I pop the mint into my mouth, eyes hungry on the stacks.

"Do take care of yourself, Draco," he says, giving my shoulder a pat. "Take your time browsing." He gestures toward the new releases. "Anything you need mailed to Hogwarts, just give to me as you leave."

I browse through the shelves, taking two books with me as I climb a ladder to a nook on the back wall. Morty and Maggie used to have a cat up here when I was younger. The cat died when I was eight, but they still keep a folded blanket here, and I like to think it's for me.

Morty winks at me as I settle in, and I lose myself for a while in the new Lance Gainsworth, *Undesirable No. 6*. He's announced there will be seven. I wrote to him two years ago after the last one came out to let him know how much I enjoy them. I didn't expect anything back, but two weeks later I received a package of five signed copies, and a note promising delivery of the final two upon completion.

I could wait for the signed sixth to arrive… but I don't like to read the signed ones. I don't like to break the spines or leave fingerprints on the silver covers.

I'm on chapter seven, and the two lovers have finally been reunited. The front door squelches open, and something tugs at me to look up for the first time in an hour.

Hermione Granger dances through the door, looking around like she never seen a bookstore in her life.

Her jaw is dropped open, eyes devouring.

"Hello, miss," Morty says.

I pull myself behind the tall shelves, eyes watching her through the gaps.

"Good afternoon," she says. "How long has this bookshop been here?"

"My wife and I opened this shop forty years ago," Morty says, removing his glasses.

Her eyes sparkle. She scans the shelves, and I pull my shoe back when she glances my direction. Her hair hasn't been styled smooth since the Yule Ball, but it's pulled back today. Her neck stretches, and I lick my lips.

She chats with Morty, and he's kind to her. He gives her a bit of a tour, pointing out the new releases, where the fiction section is, where the biographies are.

She does what she does at Hogwarts: carries five or six books in her arms while still looking through the shelves. Like she doesn't have magic to float them. Or a shopkeeper to hold them at the counter. She sets them on her hip, disappearing every so often around the fiction stacks so I can only see her knees through the spaces between books. Her face appears when she pulls a book, and I watch her read the cover. She smiles at the description, and I crane my neck, trying to figure what title it is.

Maybe Morty knows. I look down at the counter, to find him smiling up at me softly. I jump, looking down at the Gainsworth, finding my place again.

The front door opens again, and I look up to make sure she's not leaving.

It's Father. He scans the shop stiffly. He's found me here before, and sometimes I tuck away into this nook and watch Morty lie to him, say he hasn't seen me.

Father sweeps over the stacks, lips in a frown, and he ignores Morty's greeting, prowling towards the fiction.

Towards her.

I stumble down the ladder, leaving the book, shoes catching on the rungs until I'm almost falling down the ten feet.

His eyes catch on my frantic movements, and he pauses just before turning the corner, barely three paces from her.

I nod at him and say, "Finished?"

He lifts a brow at me and I push toward the door, begging him to follow.

"See anything you want today?" Morty asks, a smile playing on his lips.

"Er, no," I stammer, looking away from Father. "Thank you, Mr. Hindes."

We walk to the Apparition point, and I apologize when Father snipes at me about running off.

~*~

Saturday, February 12, 2000 – later

There are scratches down my back and knickers in my pocket.

The scratches… I have a hazy memory of. Her nails in my skin as she trembled under me.

The knickers… I have a few questions about their appearance.

I finally made it back to the Manor after a difficult thirty minutes of tea with Blaise and Melody, who seemed to know Blaise's kitchen far better than a one-night stand should.

"And you just sent her home?" she'd asked, boiling water in the kettle, a robe wrapped around her that matched Blaise's.

"Should I have taken her home?" I asked.

"Yes."

"No."

Blaise and Melody spoke together.

"Listen, Mel," Blaise had begun pompously. "You don't know the full situation here. Draco would have probably made an ass of himself if he went home with her. Saying I love you, or some nonsense."

Agreed.

"Listen, *Blaise*," Melody had hissed, hands on her hips. "It was her first time."

The three of us stared at each other.

"Oh, fuck." I said, dropping my head into my hands.

I'd come home, undressed, hissed at the pain of the cuts on my back. After examining them in the mirror, remembering the way she'd moaned, the scent of her skin, I started to shuck my trousers.

Which is why I'm standing here with her knickers in my hand, wondering how I did it. I remember seeing them on the ground near the couch, and then I looked up to hand them to her and she was bending over, grabbing her bra. Her legs long and arse round.

I leave the knickers on the counter, slipping into the tub, letting the suds sting at my back. I stare at them until I decide they're mine now.

~*~

Sunday, February 13, 2000

At 9:57AM, I appear in Diagon Alley with a cup of coffee. I walk through the streets to Cornerstone, pulling the door open right at 10AM.

Morty lifts his head from what he's staring at on the counter.

"Mr. Malfoy!"

I blink at him.

"Mr. Hindes. Wonderful to see you." I search the surrounding shop quickly for her.

"I was just catching up on your adventures last night," he says.

I trip on the last step. "My… my adventures?"

He lifts the *Daily Prophet* and shakes it at me. "The Governor's Ball."

I watch as Granger slides her hand into mine, gold dress glinting.

"Oh, yes," I say. "It was grand."

He stares at me for a moment. "I assumed you would be sleeping it off."

"Yes, I just…" The coffee cup in my hand steams. "I thought maybe I'd…"

"She won't be in today, Mr. Malfoy."

My stomach twists. Has she run?

He continues, "I told her to take the day off."

"Oh, right. Very kind of you, Mr. Hindes."

He hums, and pushes his glasses up his nose. He eyes the cup in my hand. "Is that coffee for me?" He smiles.

I press my lips together. "Yep."

I wander Diagon Alley that day, bumping into all sorts of men looking for gifts for their spouses, and I have to remind myself that it's too early to be buying her diamonds. She wouldn't want diamonds anyway. But I want to give them to her.

~*~

Monday, February 14, 2000

I wait with coffee at the front desk. Melody is giving me a hard time, asking me if I need anything with a glint in her eye.

"Malfoy."

I look up and Mockridge is standing in his office doorway, beckoning me. He disappears inside, not waiting for a response. Because it looks like I'm unoccupied. Because I'm standing here, doing fucking nothing.

I look to the clock.

"I'll handle that, Mr. Malfoy," Melody says, lifting a brow.

I sigh and hand her the coffee, heading towards Mockridge while Melody paces to Granger's office.

Mockridge is interested in the Buckworth donation we secured Saturday night, and I tell him I'll discuss it more in depth in the Senior Consultant meeting. I hear the elevator ding. After a few morning pleasantries I leave his doorway, pacing back to the front. Melody nods to Granger's office.

I slip through her doorway, a bit less suave than I could have hoped.

"Granger. Yes, good," I stammer.

She looks up at me with her beautiful eyes, and I remember her face as she came. The way she held me inside of her like I belonged there forever.

"Er, Senior Staff meeting at nine," I say. I want to spend time with her today. "And then we should meet about the Werewolf Policy financials. After lunch?"

"Yes. Great."

I nod. This was wonderful. I'd eat lunch and then I'd feast on her. I wonder if she'll let me bounce her on my cock.

I'm halfway out the door, looking at my timepiece. I can't wait four hours.

I turn back to her door, suggesting we meet before lunch.

"Yes. Great." She's breathless. And I intend to keep her that way.

Blaise keeps exploding hearts and confetti everywhere he goes, and it keeps reminding me that I should have something for her. Something to give her for Valentine's Day.

He bursts into the conference room, spraying glitter everywhere, promising to clean up after himself. She's already seated with her coffee cup.

"How was everyone's weekend?" I ask, taking my seat. She's blushing, not looking up at me. And I wonder what she's thinking about. If she's possibly thinking about us.

Blaise says, "I was having a lovely time at the governor's mansion before Granger came in and took all the attention."

"Yes. Blaise, Granger, and I attended the Valentine's Ball on Saturday. Blaise was able to secure a few accounts. Granger had a successful evening as well."

She chokes on her coffee. And I didn't even mean to make a secret joke, but now I'm desperate to get her alone. Now that I know that she's thinking about it.

I spend the next hour focused. We discuss our funding, our progress. I let them know I've chosen Cornelia Waterstone for the Wizengamot position. I see her head rise to look at me, and I know she's pleased.

I tell them about the fruit basket up front, and then I say, "Granger and I will be working on financing now, but I'll be available after lunch for anything."

And if you dare to fucking disturb us, I will hex your bits off.

I wait for her outside the conference room. She takes forever to exit, and then I lead her to my office. Maybe I should get a bed installed in there.

I let her enter first, and I almost grab her ass on the way inside. I shut the door behind us, and lean back on the door.

We should talk first, yes? She would want to talk?

She turns to me, clutching her notes in front of her. Her eyes are bright and anxious. Her hair is down again today. It's been down every day since I ripped out her hairband.

I feel desire licking at me, like an infection I can't stop the spread of.

I hear the people just on the other side of this door, and I wonder if it turns her on as much as it does for me.

"Do you think you'll be able to keep quiet, Granger?" I hum, knowing she can't. Knowing she moans, and cries out. We'll need to work on that so I can have her in every place imaginable.

Her eyes burn out. "Yes." She nods at the carpets. "No, yes, I understand." She clings to her paperwork, and I wonder what she thinks she understands.

I watch in horror as her eyes meet mine, tears welling up. "I'll be able to keep quiet. Keep this to myself. We can pretend it never happened if that's what you want."

Fuck, we're both such idiots. I hate us so much.

"Let me clarify: Do you think you'll be able to keep quiet," I say, smirking at her, moving towards her, "or do I need to silence the room."

I see it dawn in her eyes. And then she licks her lips, and I'm so glad she understands because we need to be naked now.

"You'll need to silence the room."

I do just that, and then she's rushing into my arms. My hands on her hips and hers in my hair. Her lips pushing against me, starved, and a deep fear that it had all been in my head vanishes.

Her mouth is frenzied and I grip her head in one hand, angling her face. She sighs into me once I've taken control. And I file that lovely thought away.

What a silly little bint, to think I would want to forget this ever happened.

"Merlin, I thought I lost you," I say, moving down her jaw, sucking on the covered bruises.

"*You* thought? You're the one being so cagey—"

"I was aiming for playful."

"You're always playful—"

I pull her hips to me, and her hands start to unbutton my waistcoat. My cock twitches with the proof that she wants us to be naked, wants me inside of her again. I let her unbutton and remove the vest and then I grab her backside, lifting her. She makes the most adorable sound of surprise, and I look for a surface to fuck her into.

My eyes lift from her neck, and find that window next to the couch. The space she'd filled in the *Prophet* photoshoot. The space she'd filled ever since. She smiles at me when I press her body into the wall, almost like she remembers it like I do.

I pull her knees around me, locking her legs around my waist. She presses me tight to her and I groan deep my chest. I keep a steadying hand on her thigh while unbuttoning her blouse, my eyes dropping to her chest every time I forget to move my lips against hers.

Once I've tugged her blouse out of her skirt and finished with the buttons I peel it wide, drinking in her skin, trying to memorize her tits, giving myself more time than I'd taken on Saturday.

"Er, the paperwork? Are you worried about it at all?" she whispers.

I reach up for her chest, filling my hand with her breast.

"The Werewolf financials? No, of course not."

She stutters, and I smile at the way I can make her lashes flutter. I drift my hand on her thigh under her skirt to her knickers. "I – I meant the… contract."

"Contract?"

I want all this lace off her. She moans as I press against her clit and reach for her bra fastenings.

"The Love Contract."

I freeze. That bloody contract. Is she afraid of the repercussions?

"Are you worried about it?" I ask.

"Only in the sense that I signed a document promising not to do this."

And then she squeezes her legs around me, rubbing herself on my hand. The little minx. I continue taking off her bra, and say, "Only in the sense that I *created* a document to keep us from doing this."

She smiles and I slide into her knickers, running my fingers through her.

"And to keep Blaise away from Melody," I toss in, kissing her neck.

"Well, that's not working." She laughs, and the sound tickles my ear, shivering my chest. And I set out to make her quake.

My fingers swirl around her clit, my other arm wound around her back. I can feel her chest against mine, and her breath comes sharply.

"We can discuss it later, I guess," she mumbles. "It's a common contract for businesses, especially privately owned. I've looked it up."

"Shh. You can teach me later."

I imagine her bouncing on me, quizzing me on the Goblin Rebellions, not letting me come until I summarize my arguments—

"Ah!"

She jerks away from me, and I tighten my hold so she doesn't drop. My fingers had just pushed inside, the warmth beginning to swallow me again.

"What's wrong?" I search her face, watching the tension in between her brows and along her jaw.

"I'm fine." She smiles with tears in her eyes. "Just sore. Keep going."

I stare at her face, waiting. She tells me she's fine again, and tries to kiss me.

She's uncomfortable. Sore.

I drop her on the arm of the couch, and she clutches me with her thighs so I can't stand up tall. "Don't stop. I'm fine. I want this."

She brushes her desires against my ear and I almost push into her right there.

I lean my left arm against the back of the couch, and move my right into her knickers. I swirl against her clit and watch her face relax. I push one finger inside of her and she likes that. I keep my thumb moving on her clit, watching her face.

She looks up at me with those eyes and begs me to fuck her. This witch will destroy me.

I try two fingers, hoping… And she winces.

She lies, telling me she's ready. I stand up, pulling back from her, wondering what to do with her now. And then she's scrambling, tossing away her bra, unbuttoning my shirt.

I watch her chest rise and fall, as I pull my shirt off. She starts on my trousers, and I feel like I'll need to sit soon. It's dizzying, the way she wants me.

She moves button by button, down the front of my trousers, teasing more as she goes, scraping her fingers down my shaft. Her nipples are pulled tight, and she's licking her lips staring at my crotch. I wonder if I could ask her to suck me off.

No.

That's too…

She wouldn't want to.

But I think of sugar quills and soup spoons, and I grow harder against her fingers. She's almost done with my buttons and I reach up, running my fingers over her bare breast.

She gasps.

And one day I'll ask her. One day I'll tell her she can have whatever she wants from me if she'll just use her mouth. Just once.

I imagine my cock sliding between her lips, and I tweak her other breast.

She moans and leans forward, pressing her forehead to my stomach. Her lips just inches away from where I want them.

Her tongue would press lightly, unsure, as her eyes stare up at me, asking for guidance.

I could teach her how to suck me off.

I've been rolling my fingers around her nipple, absently driving her insane. Her hips are dragging slowly on the couch. She'll be so easy to get off. Maybe a few times. And when she groans, her lips grazing my stomach, I look down to take in her naked torso. Her hands are on my waist, and there, on her left arm, a pale raised scar.

I can hear her screaming, and Bella's laugh.

She moans now…

I blink it away, and I watch her breathing on my stomach. Lost in the feeling of my fingers. Begging me to please her.

Maybe I can erase those memories for both of us. Overwrite them with different sounds.

I release her nipple, push my trousers down and kneel in front of her.

I roll down her knickers and she moans. "Oh, god, yes."

I never got to taste her. Not even suck my fingers into my mouth.

I kiss her knee, looking up at her. Her breasts heaving, her knuckles tightening on the couch arm. I kiss her thigh, and her eyes flutter. I'm pushing up her skirt – the only article she's still wearing – and pushing her legs apart, kissing the inside of her thigh when she finally tenses.

She's stammering something but I've finally caught sight of her bare cunt, glistening. The air leaves my lungs, and her thighs tremble under my hands. She's perfect. Just like I always imagined her to be, but better.

She's going to talk me out of this. I can hear her begin. No one's ever done this to her. No one's ever tasted her and I vow to be the first and the last.

I swallow and think of the best way to distract Hermione Granger from her intentions. A pop quiz.

"Granger, why don't you tell me the history of the Giant Squid in the Hogwarts lake?"

She stares down at me, mouth open mid-protest. I kiss her thigh again.

Teach me, Granger. Tell me everything you know.

"It was deposited there in 1306, yes?" I ask, knowing full well—

"No, it was there from the beginning," she says. Good girl. "The founders—"

I bring my mouth to her, one open-mouthed kiss to her cunt, and she growls a gasp, something that will bounce around my had for years to come.

The taste of her. It wasn't like I had loads of experience with this, but her taste…

Pansy made me good at this. Or good enough for her. It was easier to shut off my mind when my lips couldn't whisper her name.

"Yes? The founders?" I ask. One kiss for each correct answer. I feel like she'll appreciate that.

"The f-founders placed Hogwarts castle on the – the – the grounds, next to the black lake." I lean into her, loving the way her eyes never leave me, like she'll watch me as she comes. "So, the giant squid was there all alo—"

Good girl. I part her with my tongue, hands squeezing against the muscles in her thighs as she jumps, and I push my face into her, licking up from her entrance to her clit.

The sounds she makes…

Fucking Merlin…

I do it again, dragging through her, slipping across her opening slowly, and one quick swirl to her clit. Her hands cover her face, like she can't bear it.

"And the squid." I can't be bothered to pull my mouth away. "It's a greenish color, yes?"

She corrects me. And it trembles me. I realize I'm leaking, cock pointing high, and aching for her.

"It's killed people, I've heard," I say, leaning to her again, and I'm dizzy when I taste more of her, pouring from her like honey.

She argues, fights for the squid, gasping the facts and saving the Giant Squid's reputation even as I tongue at her. She starts preaching about the merpeople and I almost moan. I latch onto her clit, closing my lips and sucking until I can press my tongue against it softly.

She grabs my hair, pressing my face into her cunt, and I bring a hand to my cock, squeezing the base so I don't come.

"Oh, god Draco. Please!"

I pump myself once, twisting my hand around the head, and then coming back to tighten around my base.

I release her clit, and mumble into her sex. "What about the merpeople?"

Her nails cut against my scalp as she rattles off dates and facts, things I already know. And since she's correct, I feel like a reward is in order. My tongue swipes over her clit, up and down, side to side, diagonally, and then harder, putting more pressure on her when she pushes my face closer. She tugs hard at my hair and I slide my hand around my shaft again, groaning into her cunt. Her fucking perfect cunt.

She's gasping, rolling her hips against me, moaning for me.

I push a finger into her. She whispers my name into the air, begging her Muggle gods for release and mumbling words about perfection and always.

I let my tongue write my name against her clit, signing myself to her.

She screams. And clutches my head, gasping for me.

I'm dragging my hand on my cock as thick honey pours from her onto my fingers, and when she's done trembling around me, after the final crest hits her walls, she releases my hair, and I slip my dripping hand from her cunt and wrap it around my cock, the slick slide of it tightening my balls.

Finish before she knows. Before she sees what she does to me.

I look back at her swollen cunt, imagining my signature across her parted folds, pink and slick.

Mine.

I groan, feeling the edge of release, just there. My eyes drift up, past her shucked skirt, up her stomach to her breasts, flushed and plump. I need to take my time there next. Need to give them attention. Up to her face, and I see her eyes watching me, lips open and panting. Her eyes dark and bright and her sweating pink face flushes further. She bites her lip, and my cock swells, ready for her.

I look down at her cunt one last time, and I come all over the black couch, imagining it's her stomach, or her arse, or that the wet squeeze of my hand is her cunt.

I'm heaving air, lightheaded, and sticky now. I drop my head forward, catching my breath on her thigh, my eyes never leaving her center.

She pushes my hair back, and I look up at her, a small smile looking down on me.

Mine.

I kiss her thigh, and lift my head, seeing my office again. I vanish the mess, smirking at ruining Blaise's favorite couch again.

"So," I say, and I can hear her come thick on my vocal chords. "Do you think you have a handle on the Werewolf financials?"

She smiles at me, like I'm the only one who knows how to make her. "I don't know. You may have to go over that last part again."

What a fucking tease, this witch. I grin at her. "I'll schedule a meeting tomorrow at lunch."

~*~

Tuesday, February 15, 2000

The woman is trying my patience.

She wore a black bra in today. It's nothing fancy, but it still means that Hermione Granger owns a black bra. And maybe she's wearing black knickers.

But I promised myself I'd give her a few days to recover, so we're on the couch again. I've pulled her into my lap, sitting her on my knee while I kiss her deeply. Her hands landed on my shoulders and I opened her blouse to find this black bra.

She grins at me. I pull her to lay across the couch, and her legs part for me to slide into place. I slide her skirt up, out of the way, and she shivers.

They are black. Simple, but black. I'm staring at her black knickers while she reaches for my belt.

No, no, Granger. Not for a few days.

I think of eating her out again while she's wearing these black knickers, pressing my nose into them while my tongue pushes inside of her. But I want to try something else.

I move her hands away, and lay down on top of her. She kisses me and I press my hips against her center. She sighs.

I move to her neck and drag her leg up, slipping closer to her, feeling that warmth against my cock again. I want to take my trousers off, but I don't trust myself.

I push our hips together, relishing the small noises she makes. She turns her head into my neck, nipping at my ear. I suck a pathway down her chest to her breasts, kissing her over the bra, and trying to keep a rhythm in our hips.

I pull the cup down, and her nipple is tight already. I pull it into my mouth, sucking and pushing my tongue against it.

She sighs, and holds my head to her. Her legs slip around my hips, and then it's just the tent in my trousers pressing against her core, rolling slow waves over the both of us.

I swirl her nipple over and over, moaning into her skin, and pulling at her other bra cup until I have her other breast in my hand. She moans the most delicious sound and I run my teeth across her. Her back presses up to me.

I kiss across her chest to her other nipple, looking up at her face. She's turned to the ceiling, eyes closed and lips open. Her hips are pushing back against me, and I drop my hand between us to press over her clit, over the black knickers.

"Oh, god," she sighs, and her knees press against my waist.

I suck on the skin around her nipple, nipping and biting, pulling the soft skin between my teeth. Her hands sweep through my hair like waves, and I pull my hand away from her center, pressing my cock to her clit again. She breaths against my forehead as I thrust carefully against her.

I suck her nipple between my lips again, fingering at her other in soft pulls, and she begins to thrust back at me, her chest lifting to push against my mouth and her hips snapping up to meet mine.

I'm leaking into my trousers, and moaning around her nipple. She's twisting my hair around her fingers, and I shift until I'm in a position to just rock into her over and over and over, and she throws her head back, calling my name, and moans a long low growl that sings in the air.

My tongue flicks at her nipple until she relaxes back against the leather cushions, lips open, and then I continue rocking, feeling the wet slide of her knickers against my trousers, my cock remembering her cunt, remembering the wet heat and pushing closer and closer to get inside of her.

I release her nipple and dive into her mouth as I come against her, my tongue sweeping through her mouth and my moans swimming down her throat to be a part of her.

She holds my shoulders as I shiver, hips jerking against her and emptying into my trunks. Her tongue meets mine, and we kiss slowly, our pleasure leaking against each other.

My cock takes forever to soften as her tongue pushes into my mouth, drinking me down. Her breasts stay tight and hard against my chest, pushing up into me as her body rolls in slow waves.

I could probably make her come again, but we have a meeting in ten minutes.

~*~

Wednesday, February 16, 2000

She's reached into my trousers.

And I'm watching her fingers close around my cock.

I look up at her panting, and her eyes are wide, brows lifted.

Perfect.

"It's perfect," I assure her.

She blinks, nodding. She strokes me softly, up and down, like a tease.

"You can… I…" I stammer, never imagining that I would need the words to explain to Hermione Granger how to stroke my cock. She pauses, and I say, "Squeeze a bit more."

She does as instructed, and I sigh against her forehead. She pulls at me, fist tight, and I tilt her face up to kiss her, which is more of a breathy gasping against her lips.

She's leaning back against my office door, tugging at my cock, and when she switches the angle of her wrist I choke.

"Is it…?"

"It's good," I sigh into her neck, dropping my head forward. I reach down and close my hand around hers, giving her a pace, and then twisting her wrist at bit at the end. The first time she does it on her own my legs shake.

I grab her hips, wheezing on her neck.

She pulls back, and slips her dress off her shoulders. I watch as it flutters to the ground. She pulls down her knickers and carefully tugs my trousers and trunks to the floor.

She maneuvers up into my arms, legs around my waist again, like she wants us to try again. We really should give it a week, yeah?

But she's stroking my cock again, kissing me suggestively, biting at me.

I pull back, before I lose control with her.

"Don't be such a Hufflepuff about it, Draco."

A *Hufflepuff!*

I'm about to drop her on her arse when she smirks.

I'll show her *Hufflepuff*.

I push her against the door, tongue sliding into her mouth and cock sliding against her. She moans, and I guide myself into her, pushing slowly, feeling the tension in her body. Once I'm surrounded by her heat again, I look to her and she nods.

I slide out of her, holding her up with my arms, and push back in. Merlin, this sensation. This mind-blowing feeling.

I kiss her slow, lazy and without intent.

She moves, trying to set a pace, and I pull back to wait for her permission. I move faster, still a slow glide, hitting deep inside her, waiting for the pain to reappear on her face. She nods again, and I let my hips move, grunting into her hair.

Her hair, down and wild, swallowing my breath.

I hear a rattle, and we both stop. The door shakes with my thrusts. She laughs and I move us to the next wall. I wonder if the office can hear it.

I wonder if I care. I almost open the door and yell out, Hello all, I'm fucking Hermione Granger.

The thought has my hips snapping. She gasps, and I watch her face. It's faster than it's been, deeper too. She blinks at me with wide eyes, and I twist my arm until I can push at her clit. She rolls her eyes back and I feel her squeezing around me as I pound her hips into the wall.

"Fuck," I moan.

And she's gasping, holding my cock inside of her so tight that I can only roll my hips.

~*~

Thursday, February 17, 2000

We're in her office today, but only because Buckworth is here to finalize things. I can't keep my eyes off her mouth as she talks policy and legalities.

I walk Buckworth out, adjusting myself before standing.

I come back to her office, silence the room, and lift her onto her desk. I take my time kissing her, undressing her. This was our only meeting today, and I told Carrie and Walter to clear our calendars for the rest of the day.

When I push everything off her desk to make room for her long body, she laughs, and looks up at me like I'm the answer to a difficult Arithmancy problem.

~*~

Friday, February 18, 2000

I'm dusting kisses across her ribs when I wonder at how they protrude.

I've now memorized her entire body in ways I can paint, but her skin is thin here.

I ask if she's been sick, and she laughs, reminding me that I've occupied her lunch breaks for the past five days.

I pull back from where I had leaned over her on my desk, ready to feast on her, maybe lick at her cunt again, suck at her tits, and then maybe ask her how she felt about bending over this here desk.

I button up, and go ask Carrie to bring us lunch in twenty minutes. No earlier.

She smiles at me when I return to her, and I pull her hips to the edge of my desk, sucking on her neck as I just say *fuck it*, and push inside of her.

I use every second of those twenty minutes, and she's clenching me and whining in my ear, and I'm pumping into her, slapping our skin together and circling her clit until she shivers and screams something unintelligible into the room. I come only moments after, and I barely have a second to lick the sweat off her skin before Carrie knocks at the door.

I pull out of her, and she tumbles off the desk, searching for her shoes. I tuck in my shirt, muttering a spell to pop the buttons through, and close my trousers. I poke my head out, thank Carrie, and take the food.

She probably knows. But bless her, she doesn't make a comment about my flushed face or sweaty hair.

Granger has her blouse closed by the time I shut the door.

She cons me into talking about actual work while we eat, and I suppose that is fine.

I ask her if she'll be at Cornerstone this weekend. I sense her hesitate before saying yes.

"Will you?" she asks.

I clean up the mess from my sandwich and say, "Maybe Sunday."

"Is there a book you need?" she teases.

"Something like that." I smirk back at her.

She smiles, and then says carefully, "What do you have tomorrow?"

I want to lie. But why would I?

"I'm visiting my father." I stare down at the carpets, and she stutters, trying to ask, so I say, "It was part of his conditions to the inheritance. That I visit him on the monthly visitations in January and February."

I turn to see her poking at the remains of her salad, methodically, like avoiding my eyes.

I take the container from her, and bend across her lap to kiss her.

Bleu cheese. Of course. Her and bleu cheese. Disgusting.

"If you'd told me we'd be kissing again, I wouldn't have ordered it." She smiles.

"No, no. It's your favorite," I say, kissing her again until I press her into the cushions.

~*~

Saturday, August 26, 1995

"This soufflé is absolutely decadent, Mrs. Malfoy," Pansy sings. "I would be honored if Remmy could share the recipe with Yolly, my father's elf."

My mother lifts a polite brow and says, "Of course, dear. I'll have Remmy get in touch."

"Thank you, Mrs. Malfoy. Draco," Pansy coos, "isn't it divine?"

I hate the soufflé, but I assume that's not quite the point.

"It's lovely," I say. And Father's lip twitches.

It's only quiet for a moment before Pansy starts again.

"Mrs. Malfoy, did I see a late Victorian lamp in the drawing room? It looks so similar to the Rashan that we have in the summer cottage. I wondered if it was designed by him as well?"

Mother blinks at her. "You know, darling, I have no idea. I would be happy to find out and write to you."

"Oh, no," Pansy says. "I was just curious. Please do not trouble yourself."

I rub at my temples before returning to the rotten soufflé.

"Miss Parkinson," Father asks. "How are your marks? Any favorite subjects? O.W.L.s coming up this year."

Pansy rattles on to Father about her marks. Pansy compliments my mother's taste again. Pansy talks about me an awful lot. Pansy is a nervous wreck.

"She'll do," Father says when Pansy and Mother have settled on the couch after dinner. Father pours me a Firewhisky and says, "You like her?"

I blink at him. "She's fine. She's… a lot."

Father smirks. "That will fade. She's terrified of your mother. As she should be." He drinks deeply from his glass. His eyes land on Pansy again, and then he says, "You know the contraception charm already?"

I cough, sputtering my drink.

"I— yes, Father."

"Good," he says. He looks to me. "You can never be too careful, Draco. If she gets pregnant, you will marry her. End of story." He looks back at Pansy and Mother. "Doesn't matter if you're fifteen or twenty-five, there will be no children outside of a union."

My hands shake as I nod and sip from my tumbler. "I know, Father." There was a brief mention of this two summers ago when he sat me down on the very chairs Mother and Pansy are perched on and told me things I never wanted to know about the female body.

"And trust me, Draco," he says, "Miss Parkinson knows it too." His eyes drift over Pansy again, and he says, "Don't trust her to cast the charm. That one knows exactly what she wants and exactly how to get it."

I frown at him.

"She wouldn't do that. She's masterful, yes, but not—"

"Draco," he says, turning to me and lifting a brow. "There's not a single person in this room that believes you wish to marry Miss Parkinson." He clasps my shoulder. "She will do whatever is necessary. Mark my words."

I watch as he brings two glasses of port to Pansy and Mother.

Pansy smiles brightly at me over Mother's shoulder.

~*~

Saturday, February 19, 2000

It should be a fairly simple visit.

There's nothing left for us really.

I don't even bother to smooth my hair back.

I have fulfilled my commitments. He has fulfilled his.

We will be done.

So, when I pull my chair to sit across from him, and his eyes sweep my scalp, I almost smirk back at him.

He asks me about the client list. He asks me about Waterstone. And then he asks about her.

"She's wonderful. We have the Werewolf policy fully funded. Rhett Buckworth sends his regards."

He grins at me. "And how are you and Miss Granger progressing personally?"

"We're working very well together." I keep it simple and factual.

I'm so relaxed that I only notice at the very last moment that he's pressing forward, looking into my eyes.

My bricks sprout high, blocking him out. I frown at him. "Is there something you'd like to ask, Father?"

His lips twitch. "She looked absolutely stunning at the governor's ball, Draco. I'm just interested to know if you fully appreciated the view. I saw in the *Prophet* that the two of you walked arm in arm for most of the evening."

"We did," I say. "She was my business partner, not my date."

He hums, examining me. "It's been several years," he says, "but I assume you still remember the contraceptive charm?"

My eye twitches, and I open my mouth to fight him.

"Or I suppose," he continues, "this time it might be *you*, who tries to conveniently forget it one night." He chuckles. "I don't know her very well, but I would guess she would prefer to be married—"

"No," I hiss. "You *don't* know her very well."

He eyes me, taking in my stiff shoulders. He never took kindly to being interrupted.

"Is there anything else we need to discuss, Father?" I ask. "This is my last mandatory visit with you."

"Mandatory?" he chuckles. "Well, now." He crosses his legs.

"Yes. The terms of our contract were that I would visit you in January and February in exchange for ten weekly installments of the inheritance," I say, back straight in my chair. "Now, I would guess that by simply walking into this room today, I have fulfilled my end of the deal." I clasp my hands. "Is there anything else? Or shall we say our goodbyes."

His eyes harden, in a way that used to make me shiver.

"No," he says slowly. "I guess our terms are met."

"Wonderful." I stand swiftly. "Then I assume I will receive the final three installments of my inheritance over the next three weeks." I look him over and say, "Goodbye, Father."

I turn to the door, and he sings, "Yes, you should. Assuming all terms are met."

I pause, clenching my jaw, and turn back to him. "As previously discussed, all terms of our agreement have been met, so I don't—"

"*Our* agreement, yes." He examines his nails. "Miss Granger's agreement, however, is still being worked through."

I feel a hum in my veins.

I have years of experience with this man that tell me this is a trap. This is an excuse and a ploy for attention. But still I cannot help myself when I ask, "Excuse me?"

He looks up at me, eyes bright with mischief. "Miss Granger's agreement with me," he says simply. "Surely you know of it, since you *know* her so well."

I stare at him, waiting. Waiting for him to play his hand. Waiting to pick apart his words until they are nothing more than intimidation and manipulation woven together with a lilting aristocratic voice.

He continues, so I don't have to ask. "She's been seeing Madame Michele for seven weeks now. Two or three other instructors as well." He grins at me.

I swallow. "I don't believe you."

He laughs. And it ricochets off the damp stones. "You know, Draco, I'd heard that love blinds, but truly you cannot be this daft."

I stare at him, seated so calmly behind his table, just as if it were his desk at the Manor.

"With the way you've watched her so closely for the past ten years, I would have thought you'd notice. The little changes? Smoothing out her rough edges?" He drums his fingers on the table. "Perhaps she holds her teacups differently. Or maybe her walk is lighter." He looks at the wall. "I certainly have noticed it, and I'm locked away, watching through *Prophet* photographs."

I feel my blood running cold, like a tap turned the wrong way. She's begun to use her saucer under her cup. Her fingers on the champagne stem at the Valentine's Ball. So different from the way she held the glass at New Year's. The tall heels she wears without unbalancing. Her nails, painted and trim instead of bitten off.

Her curtsey to me during the French Waltz. How it's changed over the years. Almost as if she'd been practicing.

"Are you telling me you've sent her to finishing school?" I ask, voice dead and dry.

He tilts his head. "Are you telling me you haven't noticed?" He chuckles. "She should be at a class just now, actually." He checks the clock on the wall. "She meets her instructors weekly, and once Madame Michele confirms that she attended all classes, I instruct my solicitor to deposit your inheritance."

My lungs beg for breath. I see spots in my vision.

"Well, feel free to hold onto those last three payments, Father. She's done with that now."

"Don't cut off your nose to spite your face, Draco." He waves his hand. "She's learning so much. She's so much improved by this."

"*Improved*," I hiss. "There was nothing to improve upon—"

"We both know that's not true—"

"She's an absolute vision," I hiss. "She's the brightest witch this world has ever seen with the kindest heart. She didn't need to learn how to hold a teacup or organize a dinner party." I stalk to him, and knock aside my metal chair, listening to it clank against the floor. I press my palms against the table and look him dead in the eye. "You are the only person who thinks she needs to be more. Mother sees her true self. The Ministry sees it. Other women look up to her, envy her even. Even Pansy sees it."

He laughs, throwing his head back. His hair falls over his shoulders.

"Oh, Draco," he says. "Surely you don't think Miss Parkinson came up with the idea to use Miss Granger by herself?"

His eyes glint at me, and my head feels light. I press my teeth together as my brain spins.

He's poisoned them all against me. Who do I even have any more?

I stand tall, looking down on him, and say, "Thank you, Father… for making it very easy to say goodbye to you." I swallow, memorizing the face I will aspire to grow apart from.

He lifts a brow, and I turn on my heel, heading to a small teashop in London.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Thanks for being patient! This chapter is dedicated to my dear Mama Liz who has been patiently awaiting answers for about a year now. Honorable mention to 13Lilies and Ameliorate_88. :)

This chapter contains Death Eater-related activities that may be triggering for some. Please scroll to the bottom A/N for warnings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tuesday, February 17, 1998

I feel like I've been at the Manor more often than Hogwarts these past few weeks. Severus wakes me once a week and instructs me to get dressed because I have been selected for a mission.

That's how I find myself here tonight, playing Exploding Snap with Looney Lovegood.

She flips over a Toad Card on top of mine, and my arms jumps, chest seizing to slap my hand down before hers—

Slap!

She's beaten me, giggling.

"Fuck."

"I think that's eighteen to fourteen, yes?" she says, shuffling the cards again. The cards have only exploded twice so far.

"You cheat," I say, childish even to my ears.

"You're the one with the wand," she says. "Mr. Ollivander usually beats me. He's quite quick for an older gentleman."

I glance over to the empty space beside a stone pillar, rumpled blanket and spare socks next to a book.

"They took him yesterday," she says, without needing me to ask. I don't need to ask much with her. She just supplies. "How is school?" she says.

"Awful." I take the cards she deals me and stack them neatly. "The Carrows have moved onto *Imperio*."

She nods. "But you can resist that, yes? As an Occlumens?"

My eyes snap up to her. She flips the first card. And waits for my turn. She looks up at me and her blue eyes are almost white.

"Yes," I whisper. "It can be easier. Are you…?"

She tilts her head at me.

I stare into her eyes, sending my thoughts forwards.

A Legilimens.

I watch the words slide on a silver thread between our eyes, slithering into her pupils and disappearing inside.

She bites the inside of her cheek. "Mm. I don't think so."

I laugh. A barking sound full of relief and mirth. She literally just read unspoken words from my mind.

She leans in, like she's about to tell me the secrets of the world. "I just know how to keep the wrackspurts away."

She winks. And I'm about to laugh at her, about to flip my card over when the door to the dungeon bangs open.

I stand, pulling my wand.

Ollivander's pale, thin body crashes down the stairs, hitting step after step on the way down. Lovegood moves to go to him, and I grab her elbow.

Two pairs of boots follow, and then Dolohov and Rowle are there. Rowle kicks Ollivander's side, but Dolohov stops when he sees us. His eyes scan to the apple cores and playing cards. He slides his thin black eyes up to me, and smirks.

"Are we interrupting something, Malfoy?"

Rowle looks up, catching sight of me. His feet trip and replant. He might be drunk.

I take a breath, and everything locks into place.

"Not at all. Just keeping watch over our prisoner," I say. "Per my father's instructions."

Dolohov smiles, and moves lazily towards us. "So, old Lucius thinks this little bird needs a private guard?" His eyes rake over Lovegood. "She special? A locking charm on the door won't keep her?"

Rowle gives a wobbly laugh. Ollivander lays still and silent at his feet.

I lift a brow at them, give a long-suffering sigh, and say, "Well, to be honest, Professor Carrow is testing us tomorrow on the Imperius Curse." I glance at Lovegood. "I've been practicing. Winning card games and making her jump around a bit."

I look back at them, shrugging. And that should be it.

But then Dolohov's lips part, crooked teeth devious.

"Let's see then."

I feel a cold sweep through my limbs, and any hope of leaving the dungeon easily drains out of me.

I turn to Lovegood, my wand crushed in my grip. I raise my arm, and look into her eyes.

She gives me that small grin that I remember from months ago, when I had my wand turned on her in a classroom, ready to sizzle her nerve endings.

"*Imperio*."

She sways on her feet. And then hops onto one. And I don't know if I'm actually cursing her or if she's reading my mind.

She hops to the other foot. And then – something I did *not* ask her to do – she does a jumping jack.

I drop my wand and she relaxes. I look back to Dolohov.

His eyes glitter an ugly color and he says, "Is that the best you've got, Malfoy?"

I shrug. "I'll probably pass the exam."

Rowle hiccups, leaning on the stone wall. "You wanna—you wanna really see if you're good at it, you should have her strip."

He laughs into his chest, head lolling to the side.

There's an icy shard digging into my lungs that tastes like fear. I feel Lovegood's heat next to me. She's still.

Dolohov raises a brow at me, waiting.

I sneer at him, looking over Lovegood briefly before snipping at him. "She's barely fourteen," I exaggerate.

Dolohov smiles at me, like he sees right through me. Rowle says, "Even better." He laughs and stumbles a bit.

"Not very inventive, either of you," Dolohov says, stepping forward, challenging me. "I'd test my skills by having her on her knees, sucking me off." He stops in front of me. He's reaching distance from Lovegood. I stare into his eyes, breathing slowly. "That's a real fun game. 'Cause if you let up on the *Imperio*, if you get too… distracted," he says, chuckling, "she might bite your cock off."

He chuckles. His eyes slide over to her, and I see the same expression he had looking at Granger in the paper, talking about an Auction. The same expression he'd worn a few weeks back when we broke into a Muggle jewelry shop on one of our many missions to look for a tiara, but he'd told me to wait outside while he "dealt with" the shop girls.

"The risk's a bit too high then," I say, pulling his eyes back to me. "I'll stick to hopscotch, thank you." I look to Rowle and Ollivander. "You've delivered your prisoner. I'll ask you now to leave my house."

Dolohov takes one step closer to me. I'm as tall as him, so his breath hits me right in the nose.

"I'll be watching you, Malfoy." He smiles. "You're weak, like your father." He reaches up and straightens my collar. "You'll make a mistake one day, and I'll be there. I'll make sure the Dark Lord knows how much of a coward you are. And I'll enjoy watching him end you."

I give him a small grin and say, "Looking forward to it, Antonin."

He steps back, looking over Lovegood once more, and drags Rowle up the stairs.

I'm steadying my breath still when Lovegood runs to Mr. Ollivander, pouring water into his mouth and asking what the weather is like outside.

I watch the two of them for a bit as I clean up the cards and slice up the apple I brought down for the wandmaker.

"You did very good, Draco," Looney says.

I frown at the floor, about to head upstairs again. I want to lighten the room. I don't want to leave them in the heaviness.

"What colors are they, do you suppose," I say, nodding upstairs to where the two Death Eaters disappeared.

I expect her to say puke green, or neon-spotted maroon.

"Hm." She looks up at the ceiling. "They don't have any." Her fingers twist around a curly strand. "My colors shy away from the darkness."

~*~

Saturday, February 19, 2000

There was something that wrapped around my heart, something that still clung to the belief that she would never. That Lucius was lying.

And that something unravels and falls away like a scarf in the wind when I see her sitting at a café table, ankles crossed, coffee cup hovering over a saucer as she sips.

And everything feels raw. The sun is too bright. The people are too loud.

I recognize the man from a handful of meetings with Mother years ago. He might have even been the one to redecorate the drawing room—

And I hear her screaming, cutting above the buzzing street. I see her writhing on the floor, and I think of how soft she's made me. How years of my soul stretching to touch hers has pulled me too thin.

Weak for her.

And as I approach the table, as she looks up at me in terror. As I smile at Monsieur DuBois, I think of all the little ways she's lied to me.

I guide her around the gate, escorting her out, and I wonder why she wouldn't tell me about her trip to Azkaban when I asked. How many times did I have to beg her to tell me about it.

What else is she keeping from me?

"Draco—"

"How long have you been plotting with my father," I snap, trying to make sense of all this. Trying to figure out how…

What part of this relationship is even real.

It's not a relationship, really. She's allowing me to fuck her.

We're stopped at a crosswalk, and I feel her next to me.

I win.

She's never told me that she wanted me. Never said she has ached for me for as long as I've wanted her. She said, *I win.*

"You say it like we're working together," she says, hissing at me.

"Aren't you?"

The signal changes and I plow through the street, a vague memory of where the Apparition point is.

"What did he tell you?" she demands. "If he defines it as anything other than *blackmail* then he lied to you—"

"You're not the only one who had a deal with him, Granger. You shouldn't have gotten involved in this."

She's jogging to keep up with me, and I just want to get her alone. Just get us to a private place where it's just the two of us and I can force her to start from the beginning. To tell me everything.

She asks me how I found her, and I tell her about going to the teashop.

The way Madame Michele had eyed me, knowing exactly what I was there for. Like she expected me weeks ago.

Because I should have known. I chuckle. Because it was so simple.

"You're done with those classes," I bite out.

"What about the money, Draco? The next three installments?"

We're a block away from Apparating. And I feel the clouds condensing above us.

"I told him to shove them up his ass." Essentially.

"We need that money, Draco," she pleads. "Malfoy Consulting is barely afloat as it is. I need to keep going to those classes—"

The idea is so abhorrent to me, that she would continue playing his game. I grab her and pull her into an alley, pointing a finger in her face. "You are not to step foot in that tea room again, do you hear me, Granger?"

She looks at me with wide eyes, and says, "The business is more important than some insane classes, Draco!"

I grab her arms and hiss, "*Nothing* is more important than you." I hear the skies crack apart, like bricks falling from the sky.

She breathes against my face, seeing me. Seeing all of me.

I've said too much.

I've *done* too much.

Father at least had the sense to keep his cards close to the vest with her. I've just laid all mine out, hoping she'll bet on me.

I kiss her, just so she'll stop looking at me that way, like I'm some kind of gentleman. Some kind of hero in a story.

And I press my body into hers, like no gentleman would do. Like no student of Madame Michele's Charms and Manners School would be allowed to do.

Her hands are on my waist and my tongue tangles in her mouth.

So much I need to know. So much we need to discuss. But this part is mine. She's let me have this already, so I know I can have it.

Echoes call back to me, something vile as I claim her. The ways I've won her from them all piece together in my head.

We could have split her down the middle. In more ways than one!

I think it's time you found a new bookshop, Malfoy.

Do you think she'll ever moan for you after she's screamed for me?

I pull my lips off her, hands pawing at every part of her and mouth sucking at her jaw.

"Did he ever touch you?"

"N-no. Nothing like that," she gasps, and I pull her hair until I have her neck.

"Have you been to see him since you went in November?"

My hips press into hers, begging to let me back inside.

"No, we've written – He's written letters. Threats."

I suck at her skin, marking the spot that always screams that she belongs to someone. That someone has kissed her and fucked her and wants her.

"Tell me about the letters. Tell me what he said to you."

I sink into her neck, and then she's pulling my face back, holding my head softly, looking into me with anxious eyes.

"I know what you're doing, Draco, and stop." She rubs her thumb across my cheek, calming me. "This… what we have is very special to me and you're turning it into something ugly."

She's right. I close my eyes and breathe in her scent. I press a soft apology against her lips, and ask her the question that has been slowly killing me for months.

"What did my father say to you in Azkaban?"

Please. Please, Hermione. Just answer it.

Her eyes flicker between mine, and then she does.

"He gave me a list of things. To work on."

I stare at her, waiting for more.

A list?

"For what?"

"To be…" she stutters, "to be seen with you. To be worthy of you."

In November? By that time, he'd made it quite clear that I was to stay away from her so why…

"You weren't even with the company yet," I say, looking down at the cloud-darkened stones.

"Yes, but we were being pictured together so often," she says, lashes fluttering so pretty. "And… and he knew about the Auction."

That fucking Auction.

I knew he told her. I knew it.

I wait for her to put me in my place. To spew into me the correct way to have handled this. To give me notes on my behaviors.

I wait.

She just looks at me with open, trusting eyes.

"He knew that you'd gone to Narcissa's mother." And now she does too. I wonder if she truly understands what it would have meant…

And then:

"He knew that you would have saved me."

Saved her. Funny to phrase it that way when I would have kept her locked away in her pretty little room. But her face is begging me for something, and she continues.

"He thought we were together. Had been for ages. I – I corrected him, of course," she says, looking away.

Yes, of course, please do correct him. We weren't together then and we hardly are now. Would she even classify it in such a way? With no hopes towards a future?

And then she's telling me she's seen the photographs of the alley way where I almost touched her, almost pinned her beneath me and ravaged her.

She breathes heavily, and there's rain on her cheeks. She tells me about the blackmail. The classes for the inheritance. But all I can think about is the beginning of all this.

"What was on the list?"

She speaks the words from memory, and I feel a weight crushing me with every item.

"Graceful, with table manners, skilled in hosting," she says, and I think of Mother, "witty, charming, social leader," and I think of Pansy. The list goes on, and as she stutters over "level headed" and "obedient" I try to imagine her that way. I try to think of a boring life with a

boring wife who would put up with me. Not even Mother can compare to this impossible list. And Father knows it.

"He said the only thing he could part with was pure-blood."

I feel a grin split my face.

So, it's a joke then?

He says I can have her, but only if she strips it all away to be someone un-her.

He says stay away from her, but do use her, son, if at all possible.

How are things progressing between you two?

She's so much more like this, don't you think? Much more like a Malfoy wife.

Pushing me into this, even as I try to crawl away.

I'm laughing. I'm cackling into an alleyway with half a Golden Girl about to cry.

"Why did you do this, Granger."

It's barely a question because I know it's him. It's him who served her to me on a platter, a shell of her.

"I'll finish these next three weeks, Draco, and then you'll be done with him," she says. "You'll not owe him anything. You'll be rid of him."

"No, no." I rub my face, feeling my skin buzz with the rainstorm. "I'll never be rid of him. He's got his hooks in you, now." I look at her and confess, "I'd seen it, but I ignored it. You're different. The way you drink your coffee is different. The way you walk. The way you dance." I touch her to remind myself that she's real, that she's still here. "You're changing. And now every time I see you lift your saucer with your cup, I'll think of him. Think of this. When you curtsey. When you shake hands."

She cries, this Pygmalion doll of mine.

"Why did you do this," I whisper against her lips.

"It was the right thing to do," she says, painting across my skin.

There she is.

Her brown eyes flicker between mine, searching for justice and equality, fighting for herself, fighting for others, fighting for me.

Maybe she's still in there. I lean into her mouth, wondering if I can breathe her back to life.

~*~

She tells me she has to get back to Cornerstone, and everything besides the two of us comes back to me as I pull away from her lips.

We Apparate to Diagon Alley, and when we arrive in a downpour, I transfigure a large umbrella for us. She looks like she'll say goodbye when I open the door for her, but I just dry us both with a spell and say hello to Morty. He grins at us with a secret smile that I remember from years ago, sitting high behind the counter.

She goes back to work, and I find a few books, planting myself in a large chair with a view of the counter, and cast *Oculus Dolus*.

I spend an hour watching her. Watching the way she moves. It's still her. She still fumbles with quills and parchment, like she's trying to decide the quickest way to write down her thoughts. She still shifts her weight from one hip to the other – and I wonder if she's used cushioning charms on her feet; she really should use them if she's going to insist on standing for sixteen hours on Saturday and Sunday. She still sucks on the end of her quill, even without the blue sugar to tempt her. Her lips still pull tight on the end of the feather, cheeks straining, and eyes on the paperwork in front of her.

And most important in all this, she still watches me.

Still, she lifts her eyes and finds my location in a room. Still, she looks away too quickly, even though I'm not "looking back" at her. Still, she tilts her face to the counter and lets her lashes flutter up, thinking she's the sneakiest of spies while her eyes graze over me.

Watching me at the Ministry. Watching me at Hogwarts even. I never used to think she looked at me. Never thought she'd glanced at me when I wanted her to, but maybe it's been a dance for years, spinning to different partners and turning heads away from each other.

I want to ask her what she meant when she said, "I win." How long has she been watching me.

She grabs a few books and marches into the fiction section to reshelf them. The way she walks… It's not that different, is it?

She passes the hag that's been wandering for an hour or so, steering clear of me. She smiles brightly at it. The hag jumps and turns, waddling over to a different section.

I watch her eyes come to me again, resting on me while I pretend to read. She drinks in my hair and my face, sliding over my body in a way she really shouldn't do in a place of business, but then finally resting on the book in my lap, tilting her head to try to figure out what I'm reading.

Hermione Granger and books.

I release the charm on my eyes, and when she brings her gaze back to my face, making eye contact, she jolts and blushes, turning away. I feel a grin blossoming on my lips, and she looks back at me. She smiles back, like I've just asked her to dance.

Maybe I have.

And I decide not to use *Oculus Dolus* any longer. No need to deceive her of anything in the future.

The hag pokes its head around a book stack again as Granger walks back to the counter, a little sway to her hips. The hag looks directly at me and pulls back when it meets my eyes.

I'd seen it here before, browsing but never interacting with her. I hear it shuffle to the other side of the stack, and I watch as it pokes its head out again, jumping, and retreating.

I've never seen it buy anything.

I've never seen it communicate with anyone.

But it's kept its eye on her. And on me.

A thick sludging feeling pours over my chest as I watch it pull a book with a bony hand, waddling down another set of stacks.

Granger's busy with a customer. I close my book, placing it on my chair, and move to the stacks, sliding down the shelves until I'm just behind the lumpy creature.

I see it look through the gaps in the shelves and jump when it finds me gone from my chair. It spins to go on a search for me, and it finds me directly behind it, like some kind of horror story.

It lets out a startled "meep" sound, and I glare down at it with all the Lucius Malfoy I have left in me.

"Your service to my father is complete. Leave this store and never return. If I find you within one hundred meters of Hermione Granger again, I will eviscerate you slowly with all the Dark Magic I have in me. Is that clear?"

Its black eyes gape at me. Then it drops the book and scrambles to the exit.

I listen for the door opening, and Granger says a "Stay dry!" as the shuffle of flat feet tumbles out the door.

I release my shoulders, feeling relief and anxiety swirl together. I hear my father's smug voice.

I've been having her watched since the moment she left Hogwarts.

I don't remember how many times I've seen that hag here. It was inconsequential to me. But I'm suddenly positive that every visit I've paid to Cornerstone Books has been carefully documented. Even months ago, when I couldn't stay away from her, flirting over giftwrapping.

And Lucius just asks me softly, *How are things progressing with you two?*

When he knew.

He'd known before her visit to Azkaban. Before the *list*.

I shake my head, trying to dispel some of the aches that trying to outthink my father create. I reshelf the dropped book, wondering if Lucius knew he couldn't control me any longer, so he went through her.

Graceful. Table manners.

I grab up a few more books with no intention of reading them.

Skilled in hosting. Witty. Charming. Social leader.

Moving back to my chair, I drop back, and the movement pulls her eyes to me, like she's been wondering where I'd got to.

Beautiful. Fashionable. Level headed.

She smiles softly, still speaking to the woman at the register.

Financially knowledgeable. Obedient. Trained in décor.

I watch her fingers flirt with the ledger book.

Practiced dancer. Intelligent. Cool tempered.

And something worse twists itself around my head, some small idea voiced with an aristocratic hiss and a lilting sigh.

You can have your Mudblood. But I want ten weeks.

Perhaps… Perhaps there was truth there. I could have her. I could marry her, even. But he needed to ensure that she had the proper training to handle the job.

Don't botch the proposal, Draco, he'd said, joking.

She looks over at me again when the customer leaves, and she busies herself once she's seen I'm already looking back at her.

It wasn't that simple. There is always something else with Lucius Malfoy. I let go of any hope for my father, remember that only this morning he stabbed me with words he didn't need to use. Just to make me hurt.

I clear my mind, pushing Lucius behind a wall now, and bringing Hermione forward.

By the time the shop is closing down I'm thinking of all the different ways I can touch her again. We can go to hers or mine, and I can lap at her again, begging her to teach me about the house elf wars or some rubbish.

She's saying goodnight to the final customer, and I've come to stand at the stacks, waiting. Watching her as she squirms under my gaze. I don't hold back anything, sending my desires forward in ways I haven't been able to for five years.

She flips the sign to *Closed*, and turns to me with a smile.

"We're closed for today, Mr. Malfoy," she says. "Is there anything I can put on hold for you, for tomorrow?"

Shopkeeper roleplay? Whatever else are you hiding from me, Granger?

I move to lean on the counter, gravitating closer to her. "Are you quite sure there's nothing on reserve for me back there?"

"I can check." And she turns, leans forward, and those tight denims pulls so deliciously close to her skin as she wiggles her arse for me. What a vixen she is.

She says something, but all I'm focused on is the dip of her back under her shirt, the round cheeks pressing forwards to me. And I feel my cock harden when she turns her head to look back at me, just as if I had her bent over my desk.

We haven't discussed those positions. I didn't want to frighten her off with how badly I wanted to see her bent over, or bouncing on top of me, or on her hands and knees—

I look up at her, and she's grinning. "Mind if I take a look?" I say.

She nods. "Be my guest." And she stays there. Ready for me.

I need to learn a spell to disappear denims. I'm sure Blaise knows it.

I slip behind the counter, and slide into the space behind her, my hips cradling hers as my cock pushes against her arse. I bend over her, pressing my hot breath against her ear, and sliding my hand along her ribs.

"How strange. I could have sworn something back here was mine."

She laughs, and presses into me, like agreeing with me. Mine.

Oh, we better fuck in this bookshop, Granger.

I glide my hand higher, cupping her breast and feeling for her hard nipple. She gasps and I press forward, letting her feel my cock, starting a slow roll against her backside.

I lean forward to kiss her neck, and she turns her head and says, "I think we could find what you're looking for in the non-fiction section."

There's that fire in her eyes that always spells disaster for my self-control, and I smirk back her and say, "The customer service here is impeccable."

She straightens, pressing up against me, and takes my hand, leading me around the counter to the right, towards a walled-off non-fiction section. The windows are covered with book shelves, and if anyone wanted to look inside, they would be hard-pressed to see anything in the darkness.

And then she dims the lights down.

Oh, what a saucy girl.

She turns and wraps herself around me, pressing our chests together, and slamming us back into a bookshelf, and I almost laugh into her mouth at the reverse of my own fantasy.

She tilts her head up to me, moaning as my hands slither down her waist to grab at her arse – the same arse she'd just presented to me, like it belonged to me.

She slides her hands down my chest and grabs for my belt, and I breathe heavily against her mouth as she unbuckles me like we only have ten minutes in her office before lunch arrives.

My eyes slide over to a comfy armchair in the corner, and I pause her hands on my buttons.

"Can we… Can I try something? And if you don't like it, we can stop?"

She pants against my face, and says, "Okay." And I kiss her like a man dying of thirst because she trusts me. Because she doesn't hesitate with me. And she makes me feel like I'm going to be different than my father in that regard.

I drag my tongue through her mouth, drinking from her and memorizing her tongue against mine. When I pull away I grab her hands and take her to the chair. I spin her to face the arm, and my hands reach around her hips to work open her jeans. She slides her hands up and down my wrists.

She helps me by shimmying out of the denims, but I don't let her get them past her knees before pushing my hand into her knickers, slipping through her and searching for her clit. She gasps, and her hands search for something grab, landing on the back of the armchair.

I swirl designs on her, slipping down to press inside of her, finding her perfectly wet and already squeezing me as my fingers slip inside. I groan against her ear.

"I want you to bend over this armchair," I hiss into her ear.

She tenses, breath catching.

And I say again, "And if you don't like it, we'll stop."

She nods, and I grip her knickers, pulling them down to her knees. She breathes heavily as I guide her slowly to lean over the arm of the chair. I pull the decorative pillow to rest on the seat, guiding her down to her elbows.

I pull back, looking down at her perky bum pressing up to me. I'm already leaking in my trousers.

I slide my hands along the skin of her back, rolling up her t-shirt, slipping over her arse. Her body is tense, but I massage circles into her cheeks. I hear a moan and I think it came from me.

I pop the last of my buttons and take my cock out of my trousers.

"What's… What's different about this?" she asks quickly, voice high. Probably wondering what my intentions are with her arse in the air.

"Nothing," I say. "It's the same as we've always done, just with you turned a different way."

Though, of course, as I say it I am stroking my cock, looking down at her arsehole.

"Alright," she whispers.

I reach between her legs and press my fingers into her again. "Just like this."

"Alright."

I push my cock between her legs, pressing forward, and she sighs into the pillow. I watch myself disappear inside of her and I mutter, "Fuck."

"What is it?" she says. This loss of control, loss of seeing everything, isn't really her cup of tea, I know.

"I just watched my cock slide into you, Granger," I whisper, pressing further. She gasps. "And I've been dreaming about this arse for years. Watching your hips all throughout school."

She squeaks when I push further, my hands gripping her hips tight.

I start a slow rhythm like this, watching as I enter her, feeling how tight she is like this. I ask her several times how it feels and she just responds with a breathy, "Good."

I move my hands to her waist, planted right on top of the arm of the chair, sliding my fingers along her skin, following the dip of her waist to her full hips. Her backside is so soft and full against my hipbones.

I press down, changing the angle a bit. She moans, and I thrust faster, snapping my hips into her, her body unable to wiggle against me while I push on her waist.

"Oh, Merlin, Granger…"

"Is it good?" she whimpers.

"It's fucking perfect," I hiss, slamming my cock inside of her, feeling her clamp down on me with every thrust. "Can I go faster—"

"Please."

I drive into her. Hermione Granger, bent over a chair in a bookshop, with her denim jeans around her fucking knees.

I watch her fingers curl in the pillow, her head turning into the fabric.

"Turn your head," I say.

She waits a few thrusts before complying. She faces out, hair falling over her neck and cheek. I reach forward and move her curls, twisting them softly and feeling my cock pulse.

"Look at me."

She turns back, panting. And I have to close my eyes to keep from coming.

"Oh, god…" I hear.

When I open my eyes, her mouth is open in a silent scream, and her cunt grips me as I fuck into her. I can hardly get back inside like this, but I try to stay still for her as she gasps.

Fuck I love you so much.

Her muscles start to release, and the warm wetness starts to flood between us, and I know she's not fully done but I can't wait—

I lean forward, gripping her curls in one hand, pressing her waist down with the other, and I fuck her with grunting gasps, cock sinking deep and barely leaving her heat before slamming forward again.

I look down at her arse one last time before I let go, and then I'm gazing into her eyes again as she breathes little sighs into the air, watching me come.

I tug at her hair, and squeeze at her skin, and stay buried inside of her for what feels like hours until I can breathe again. My legs tremor as I bend over, pressing kisses against her back, folding over on top of her to kiss her lips.

I feel her cunt clench me as I rest my weight on her, dipping my tongue into her mouth and smoothing my hand through her hair.

She's still in there. And she's mine.

~*~

I Apparate home, landing on the soft grass just beyond the gates of the Manor. I walk against the February wind, tugging my cloak tighter around myself. The gates admit me, and I pace my way across the path to the large front doors which open at my approach.

I find Mother in the new drawing room, glaring down at her book coolly.

"I almost sent out a search party," she says, eyes on the page.

I was supposed to be home for lunch. The Selwyns were coming over.

I lean on the doorframe, looking down at the new carpets that cover the spot where her blood is still etched into the stones.

"Tell me again about the day she went to see Lucius."

She closes her book and looks up at me. She considers, looking toward the new fireplace, and says, "He agreed to release your inheritance if he could meet her. I must admit that he already knew of your feelings for her. And I feel that agreeing under those circumstances was my mistake."

She looks at me, waiting for a reaction. I have none to give.

"Hermione went to see him... She was very nervous. And when she returned she was quite out of sorts."

I feel my teeth grind together. I nod for her to continue.

"Her first priority upon returning was making it clear to me that the two of you were not courting." I feel the sting, but I was prepared for it. "She was convinced you would not want that, though I am unsure if your father was the one who planted that idea..."

No. It was probably me. With my acid and ice. With talks of Auctions and virginities. With Katyas and Noelles.

Mother pauses. I narrow my eyes at her.

"And I asked her. Quite bluntly. And she said she had no interest in marrying you."

The words close my throat, but I've heard them before.

No interest in marrying me. No interest in becoming Father's idea of a Malfoy bride. Until the inheritance was tied to her. Then she stepped forward like a knight with a shield, facing down the fires.

"Have things changed?" she asks, softly.

She's eyeing me with a strange hope in her eyes, and I see a ballet of grandchildren spinning above her head.

"We, uh..." I clear my throat. "We have made some... progress."

Mother smiles an obnoxious grin, and I roll my eyes at her.

"I do hope you're being safe."

"Mother!" I sputter.

"Or, actually," she ponders, "do be *unsafe*, won't you? Just be engaged by the time the little one is born."

"Mother, that is quite enough out of you."

She bounces on the loveseat like a child and says, "Can we please have her over? Next weekend?"

I roll my eyes, and say, "Fine." She smiles. Then I press my lips together hating to ruin this lightness, and say, "If it's no matter to you, I'd like for you to play your last move with Father." I look at her, and find her brows drawn together. "He has been sending her to Madame Michele. I found her today with Monsieur DuBois, learning about Renaissance architecture."

The smile fades from her face, and she is still as a statue when she says, "Did you now."

I nod. "He told her the inheritance wouldn't be released to me unless she conformed."

My mother is an absolute vision when she's angry. Most people flush, fire igniting in their eyes, blood boiling. But Mother ices over.

"Draco, darling," she says, gazing out the window at the night sky. "Your father and I are getting a divorce. I hope that won't disturb you too greatly."

She plucks up her book and resumes reading.

~*~

Sunday, February 20, 2000

My Italian is a bit rusty, but I'm able to find my way to the correct villa. I knock at the door, and an old elf immediately pulls it open.

"Draco Malfoy to see Miss Parkinson," I say.

He says something back in Italian, and I recognize schedule or appointment. He looks me up and down. Elves can translate any language, so this one's just being an asshole.

"I do not have an appointment."

He frowns at me and gestures for me to wait in the entry hall. It's a small cottage, with large windows and ivy on the exterior walls. I'm examining the sitting room from its doorway when I hear heels on stairs.

"To what do I owe this surprise?"

I look up and Pansy descends the stairs in a dressing gown, her hair not fully combed, but her face already on. It's been maybe eight years since I've seen her without makeup.

She sees it in my face, stopping on the last two steps, the light leaving her eyes.

"What's wrong?"

I jump right to it, feeling a similar fire from yesterday deep in my chest.

"Have you been in contact with my father?"

Her brows meet her fringe.

"Recently? No. Why? Is there something the matter?"

I slide my hands into my pockets to stop this ache to squeeze something.

"And what about 'not recently?"

She blinks at me, eyes searching mine, dancing over my tight shoulders and closed jaw.

"He saw my design on the Argentinian Minister last June, and wrote to me from Azkaban." She crosses her arms over her chest, in a rare motion of insecurity that draws my eyes. "He… he's followed my work. Sending me congratulations, or…" She swallows. "He put me in contact with several people—"

"And you never mentioned this?" I snarl, losing whatever ounce of control I thought I had over this.

She snaps her mouth shut, eyes narrowing in a way I remember.

"Perhaps I did. It might be in one of the sixty-seven letters I sent to you while you were away."

"It wasn't." I laugh. "I read them all."

Her cheek twitches and she looks away from me.

"What does this have to do with anything?"

I prowl to the bottom of the stairs, looking up at her. "And what of 'The Modern Business Witch?" I hiss. "Did my father have anything to say about that?"

"Of course," she snaps. "He loved the design—"

"And what did he have to say about the model?"

Her lips close, and something darkens her eyes. "What did he say to you now?"

I pace, looking away from her, trying to remember who she is. Who we are. "Whose idea was it to use her?"

"Mine," she snaps.

"Really?"

"Yes," she straightens. "All decisions regarding my line are made by me. If it has my name on it, I stand by it. I'm sure you can appreciate that, Draco."

I look up at her, inches taller than me on the stairs. And I wait. She draws a careful breath through her nose.

"He wrote to me last month. After the New Year's party," she says. "He included a *Prophet* clipping of Granger, in her white dress and elegant styling, and suggested her." She laughs, and I wince at the sound. "I told him there was no universe in which Hermione Granger would consent to that kind of torture from me, but thank you. Then he let me know about her new position at Malfoy Consulting. And he reminded me of the needs she might have in the future… outside of her employment."

She looks at me, eyes catching on my scowl.

"The decision was mine, Draco. Lucius only gave me a boost of confidence that if I asked, she might say yes. If *you* asked," she said, "she might say yes."

My throat is closing, trying to decide if I need to hit something or cry.

"You used her—"

"We're *all* using her," she says, shrugging. "That's what we do, Draco." She bites her lip, smearing her lipstick. "And I won't apologize for keeping in touch with your father. He's the only Malfoy who would talk to me, and he's the closest thing to a paternal guardian I ever had. He always treated me like family."

I look away, chewing on my cheek, sniffing, and feeling the icy chill of useless anger.

"Because you're pure-blood, pure-bred, and flawlessly beautiful," I bite back, sneering at the qualities.

"What else is there?" she snarls.

I look back at her, and she's lifting a brow at me, asking me, a glistening sadness in her eyes that I haven't seen in years.

She steps down off the stairs, and comes to stand in front of me, smaller now. "He asked me to make her one of those three things," she whispers. "And I know you never needed all of that to see her as 'flawlessly beautiful…" Pansy smiles wetly at me. "But you dragged her into your world without even thinking of how difficult it would be for her. To be lacking in those three weapons."

She straightens my shirt collar, like we're on our way upstairs to a wintery Great Hall in our formal robes.

I swallow and say, "Lucius sent her to Madame Michele."

I wait for her to scowl, to ask, to react at all.

"I know."

My eyes snap to her, rage building again.

She continues, "It was obvious. To me, at least." Her hands brush my shoulders, dropping to her sides. "She was such a *commoner* at school," she chuckles, "It was clear to me that she had been working with someone."

I step away, grinding my teeth, glowering at her sitting room.

"If you want her in your world, Draco, there are things she needs to learn," she hums next to me.

I close my eyes, thinking of the list.

"If she's willing to learn them, that says something too," Pansy says at my shoulder.

I turn my head to see her looking down at our feet.

"Why would you consent to that insane idea?" I ask. "I know how you feel about her. The Pansy I used to know would rather toss her business model in the rubbish than assist Hermione Granger's career or personal life in any way."

She looks out the window. "People change, Draco." And then flatly: "I'm referring to *her*, of course. I'm as perfect as I've always been." I smile. "And it wasn't her I was helping." She looks up at me. "You may remember my feelings for her, but you must have forgotten my feelings for you."

Her eyes shine up at me, and I feel a pressing weight behind my eyes. She threads her arm through my mine, turning to stare into the sitting room with me.

"There's still a small group of us who would do anything for you," she says. "Quite irritating really."

My eyes find the window, and I stare off, trying to figure out what I can contribute to this.

"Why did you never answer any of my letters?" she whispers. "You read them, and never wrote me back. Once a week I wrote to you, for fifteen months."

A bird lands on the branch outside. He shivers his wings.

"After the first few month in Azkaban, I stopped believing that I would be released. I didn't want you hoping for anything."

She huffs a small laugh. "Contrary to your ego, Draco Malfoy, I did not spend the past two years longing for you." I feel her flip her hair over her shoulder, posturing. "I've had a grand time, thank you very much." And then she adds, "I had a torrid affair with Theodore."

My brows pull together. "Theo? He's…"

"Yes, I know that now. Let's not discuss it."

She pulls her arm from me, turning to go fetch us tea as long as I'm visiting. I feel a grin tugging at me with this new information.

"Does Blaise know?" I call after her.

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, please don't tell him."

Chapter End Notes

No idea why Hermione wouldn't include that little smut scene in her POV... :) But I'm sure Hermione learned what I have already learned: You can only write front-to-front so often before you need to change it up. Thank you to Draco's imagination for the assistance.

CONTENT WARNING: Dolohov and Rowle insinuate that they have used the Imperius curse to rape/assault women. They suggest Draco use it on Luna for oral sex. Rowle also suggests that Luna, a minor, strip for them. NONE of these events take place within the narrative. Draco is able to mediate the situation, and no harm comes to Luna.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

It's so sad that we're ramping up for the end! But don't worry. I have a few more tricks up my sleeve. ;)

This chapter is dedicated to my Reylos who I had the pleasure of meeting in person this weekend.

Sunday, February 20, 2000

When I get home from Italy, Mother is sitting with Rita Skeeter in our drawing room. I walk in just as the Quick-Quotes Quill is taking down my mother's recent Azkaban visitation dates.

Rita is sitting on the edge of her chair, rocking slightly, but pressing her lips together in a firm line, as if opening her mouth would ruin this momentous occasion.

"Hello, Draco," Mother says when she's finished. Rita turns to me quickly, eyes glittering. "My son and I have no comment," Mother finishes.

Rita snaps her jaw closed, and takes a deep breath. She collects her Quick-Quotes Quill from the air, and stands. "Thank you, Mrs. Malfoy."

"Black, if you please, Rita."

Rita's eyes grow wider. She nods quickly to me as she heads for the fireplaces. I hear the flames burst.

"Well, that didn't take long," I say.

Mother sips her tea and stares at the new curtains. "It shouldn't be a shock to him. I told him this would happen if he interfered." She presses her knuckles to her lips, and I frown at her. "I saw her today. She's not much different, but there are small things, aren't there?"

She looks to me and I nod.

"It's not very noticeable, but it's there." She circles a finger around the rim of her teacup, and says, "She's coming to dinner on Saturday." Mother looks at me with lifted brows. "Do be discreet, Draco. At least *pretend* she's not staying the night."

I feel the blood rush to my cheeks, and I look over her shoulder and nod, escaping the room before she asks me something completely inappropriate like if we need a fertility potion slipped into her wine glass.

On Monday, the paper announces the divorce on the front page. Skeeter's done a wonderful job of keeping it intriguing but vague.

I stand at the front with Melody, holding a coffee cup when the lift doors open, and I can't help but wink at her when her eyes brighten at seeing me there.

She takes the cup with a lovely blush and I fall into step beside her on the way to her office. "Senior staff meeting at ten, then we should meet this afternoon about the Golden Snidget campaign. After our lunch, of course."

She looks up at me and I let my eyes rover over her. Just the mention of our "lunches" has me wondering what her knickers look like today.

She looks nervously over my shoulder, and says, "Lunch. Yes. And what were you planning to order today?"

I smirk. This witch…

"I have a few ideas," I say. "But I'm open to suggestions."

Fuck, I think about bending her over her desk, sliding into her while looking down at her arse again. And I wonder what dirty little things she wants from me that she has yet to tell me. If I can pry them out of her.

She blushes down at the floor, and I take my cue to walk away before I do something to her here on the office floor.

"Er, Draco?" she calls me back and beckons me into her office. We stand just inside the door when she says, "I, er… I saw the papers this morning. I just wanted to make sure you were… alright."

"Excellent," I say. Strange that it would affect me at all.

She stammers her way through what she really means, which is a loose translation of "I hope you feel alright," and as she suggests that divorces can be difficult, I say, "On the contrary. It was probably one of the easiest decisions my mother has ever made."

"Good, excellent." She stutters over a mix of condolences and congratulations, and I wonder when she'll come to understand how the Malfoy family works. Will it take years? "I am shocked at Skeeter's gall though. It's quite private business, even if it is excellent gossip. I do feel sorry for your mother."

I shrug at her. "Don't. She was the one to give Skeeter the heads up." And I explain to her what Skeeter really means when she prints "They were not available for comment." I watch as her mind tries to absorb that kind of trickery. I can tell it's not easy for her.

In the meeting that morning, I introduce Cornelia Waterstone. Just as I felt when I brought her in for a second interview, I feel like Waterstone is someone the Wizengamot will not want to argue with.

I also need to announce the current state of finances in the meeting. Granger keeps her head down, and Mockridge keeps his gaze digging into me.

"I thought you had mentioned that these weekly installments were safe," Mockridge questions. "They were promised without conditions."

I face his unpleased expression. "There were conditions after all."

I feel Granger shift next to me.

I hate announcing this on Waterstone's first day. I hate cutting our interns' hours. I hate that I asked Mother for a loan this morning, so that I could cut my own salary by seventy-five percent.

But more than all of this, I hate that her shoulders have curved in on themselves, like she's somehow failed the company. Like she's the problem.

She stays at the end of the meeting, creating blots in her parchment.

"Granger." Out with it.

"This isn't fair. Not to those who've lost their jobs," she bites out.

"They haven't been fired, Granger. Their hours have been cut."

She stands, a sudden determination. "We can push back the Golden Snidget project. And I'll look for ways to cut corners on the Werewolf budget so we can reallocate those funds—"

"We can't reallocate those funds," I stop her. "The donations were given with a specific understanding of what the funds would be used for."

"So mine is the only department that isn't going through budget cuts?" She's fuming, gesturing wildly. "How is *that* fair."

"Yours is the only department fully funded by fundraising, not by the inheritance," I explain. I move closer to her to… calm her or take her hand. But we're in public with the door open. So, I just breathe her in.

She sparks and says, "But the *salary* for my department members is paid by the inheritance. Walter and me. You can cut my salary. Practically in half, really."

She's too bright. I look away from her, shaking my head. "No, Granger. We aren't cutting your salary."

"No, truly. The amount of money I make here is obscene," she whispers as I gather my things. "For February's pay, you can cut my salary, or even take all of it. No one needs to know." I'm about to stop this silly idea when she says, "Besides, with Pansy covering the costs of my wardrobe and without the classes burning a hole in my pocket, I'll have very few expenses."

Like a shard of ice pressed deep into my stomach. My fingers freeze and my breath huffs an incredulous sigh. "The expense for the classes was placed upon you?"

I watch as she shakes her head. "I wouldn't let him cover it. I refused his money."

That's… that's not good enough. That's absolutely… despicable, that's what it is. And Madame Michele allowed it? She knew where the money was coming from and she still—

"Draco." She appears in front of me, and I feel it fade. "Just for February. Cut my salary. The only person who will notice is Dorothea and I'm sure she won't say anything."

"No. That's not how we're going deal with this, Granger." I move to the door, thinking of how else to challenge our budget. "I got us all into this mess, so let me get us out."

I stalk to my office, and I'm not even surprised to find Blaise on the couch.

I feel like telling him what's happened on that couch, but knowing him, he would just snuggle in further.

I shut the door, and he says, "What's going on?" Concern on his face.

I lean back on my door, closing my tired eyes. "He's sent her to Madame Michele." I look up at the ceiling. "Once a week since the New Year, she's had interior design lessons from Claude DuBois, dance with Truesdale, and hosting and etiquette with that awful witch Bernard." I sigh. "Every week the inheritance deposits into my accounts once she's completed her lessons."

I wait, unable to look at him. Waiting for him to say he noticed it already, like Pansy did. Waiting for his shrewd judgment to come in and ask if my pride is worth this financial duress.

"So," he whispers, "he'll actually let her marry you. Wow."

I snap my head to him, feeling my neck crack. He's looking at the wall over my shoulder, mind turning. I wait.

"Why would she need all of that if she's not going to become Mistress of Malfoy Manor?" His eyes flip to me, brows pulled together.

I stare at him. Similar thoughts floated to me on Saturday. But I had to shove them away.

"It's… pointless," I say. "She's not interested in that. She's been clear."

"She has?" Blaise lifts his brows. "How?"

"With my mother, she has been clear," I explain.

He frowns. "Then why has she been seeing a Charms Mistress for eight weeks?"

I swallow. And look away from him. "It's… the right thing to do, she said." And before he can push any further I say, "I have cut off the classes, so the inheritance will be cut off as well."

He looks at his hands and nods. "I'll write a few notes, see if we can move up some meetings. I'll tell my staff we have to buckle down." He runs his palm over his face. "Fuck, I hate this part. These… adult things."

He looks absolutely miserable. And I just can't hold it back any longer.

"Pansy slept with Theo last year."

His hand drops from his face, and he looks at me with an open mouth and wide eyes.

He blinks, and says, "Thank you. So much. That's the best thing I've heard all day." He stands swiftly and moves to my Floo. "I have to give her shit *right* now."

~*~

At 11:58AM, Granger knocks on my office door, and I'm so glad I didn't start undressing early, because it's not Granger.

Cornelia Waterstone wants to chat about the Werewolf Policy. It's almost worth the expression on Granger's face when she enters my office, and realizes she needs to grab her notes.

Waterstone leaves us with fifteen minutes before Carrie comes back with lunch, and I'm already hard as I close the door on the tight-lipped woman.

I lay her out over my desk, and ask her to undress herself so I can get started, slipping inside of her and bunching her skirt up her thighs. When her fingers finally open her blouse, I dip down and lap her tits. She holds my head to her, and I thrust against her shallowly until she comes. As she's still squeezing me, I stand tall, hold her hips still, and fuck her quickly into her wood, listening to the desk scrape across the carpet with each snap of my hips. She holds onto my wrists, and tries to catch her breath as I tumble over, pouring into her.

We sit on the couch, eating lunch together, and one of these days I want to sit with her naked. Get Carrie to deliver lunch before we fuck and then just lock the door and watch her eat her tomatoes with her breasts bared to me. Maybe I'll eat her out while she eats her salad.

We talk work a bit, and it helps to center my mind on anything but fucking her again. She screamed so pretty for me today.

She's proposing ideas for the Golden Snidget Campaign, and I truly don't care much for it but it's great publicity for us.

"I'm meeting with Viktor on Wednesday," she says. No, I really don't care for it. She continues, "We're going to lunch and I'll pitch the Golden Snidget campaign. Hopefully once he's on board we can get Skeeter and Mr. Lovegood to cover the project." She munches on

her lettuce and says, "Does the magazine 'Seeker Weekly' do articles? Or just talk Quidditch rubbish?"

Quidditch Rubbish. She's remarkable.

"Yes, they have articles." I feel my lips smiling at her as she speaks, crunching, and pressing a napkin to her lips. I wonder if she's happy. If the sex relaxes her like it does for me. If just being near me makes her feel content, like for me.

I finish my sandwich and say, "Good news that Krum wants to be involved."

"Yes, he was very interested at the governor's ball."

I remember. Eyes on her chest. Hands on her body.

"Mm-hmm. I'm sure he was," I tease.

She pouts. "No, not like that."

"I'm sure just like that." My voice lilts and I see her bristle. "You can't honestly believe he's interested in the Golden Snidgets' welfare."

"He is," she snaps, and I almost laugh. "He is *very* interested in the Golden Snidgets, and I'll *prove* it to you when I come back from lunch with his full support."

She presses her lips together, peeved at me, and maybe I've changed my mind. Maybe I want to feed her the salad. Or a decadent dessert, lifting the spoon and watching as her lips part, licking it clean. Her eyes rolling back in her head at the pleasure of it.

"Sure, Granger," I say, looking back at my paper wrappings. "Try wearing a burlap sack this time instead, and we'll see where his true interests lie."

She glares at me, and I think yes, I want to feed her. Or lick something off of her. Or dip her in something sweet. Make her bathe in it. Maybe soon.

"I hear you're having dinner with my mother on Saturday."

She looks up at me, caught. "Yes, that's right." She stabs a crouton. "Will you be there?"

Feeling lighter at the possibility of having her alone for a whole night, I grab the crouton, plucking it off her fork and crunching it. "Possibly." I wink at her.

She scowls, digging for the last crouton and munching it quickly before I can steal it. I smile as she closes her container and bends for the trash bag.

"Would you consider staying the night? After dinner?" I ask, and it wasn't supposed to be a difficult question, but the crouton sticks in my throat.

"At the Manor?" She blinks at me. "In your room?"

"Or Mippy's room," I quip. "Wherever you feel most at home."

"Would… would your mother be alright with that? Isn't it… improper?"

If she only knew…

I shrug and say, "She doesn't have to know." Her wide eyes almost look interested, excited and now that she's done eating I'm ready to tempt her again. I lean into her. "We'd have an entire wing of the Manor to ourselves." She shivers as I kiss her ear. I press against her jaw, smelling her neck, and then a soft kiss to her lips that has her eyes closing. "And if she catches, us I'll just tell her to have breakfast prepared in the morning too."

Again on her lips, because I can. Because she lets me.

She smiles and quips about sleeping in Mippy's room again, and I grin at her, promising her comfort.

I should slip this in, quickly, lightly. "Also, I'll be out of town on Friday. Personal trip."

I turn forward on the couch, and I wonder when I lost the ability to lie.

"Are you going back to New York?"

My lungs jump. And I look to her, but she's only curious. "No."

There's a strange strain in the thread between us, but she powers through, like I knew she would.

"What was in New York?"

I grind my teeth together, preparing for a difficult topic.

"New York was a mistake." I let it hang there, in the silence, deciding what to tell her about Queenie Goldstein. What to tell her about me. "There's a woman there." I bite my cheek and after a breath, I say, "She's a Legilimens."

I stare at my lap, but I can feel her eyes, her interest. Before she can ask I continue.

"I needed… I thought I needed her assistance."

I finger the crumbs in my lap, wondering if she could just… not ask her next question.

"Assistance with what?"

But of course.

And what was it I was running from? What was it Queenie said to me?

Voldemort is gone, sugar. So, who are you protecting her from?

"I'm a very skilled Occlumens," I rush out. "Between Aunt Bella and Severus… I had some remarkable teachers." My skin itches. The carpets are interesting. "I've been compartmentalizing for years. Separating memories, thoughts, emotions…"

People. Entire humans can live in other boxes, Granger.

"Severus used to help me. Used to poke around until I'd regrouped. Until there were resilient walls again…"

Until you were elsewhere. Until you were safe.

"But without him…" I choke on something in my throat. "Before going to New York, I had been slipping. For months. I couldn't get the walls in place. Couldn't separate." I press my hands into my pants, thinking of how she had invaded my entire body for those weeks. "Blaise has tried to help, but he's shit at Legilimency."

I laugh and it's forced.

"I thought I needed someone to … test me. To poke around until it was all regrouped." I need to wash my hair. I feel greasy. "So, I got in touch with someone in New York who is one of the greatest Legilimens of our time. I offered to pay her handsomely to meet with me, and set up a Portkey that night."

She's silent. And I wonder what she thinks she knows about me. If things are falling to place for her.

"Is that something she does for a living?" she asks. "Is there a profession in that?"

"No, no. She refused my money. Refused to meet with me, really," I recall. "I had to beg her. She's a normal witch. A widow."

"Did it help?" she asks quietly. "Did you get what you wanted?"

I finally turn back to her. "No." I smile lightly, remembering how it had burned inside of me to hear she would quit. To know it wasn't enough. "I kissed you again, didn't I?"

Her brain was working, but she managed to smile and say, "Actually, I kissed you."

She had, hadn't she? She'd broken the spell.

"Yes, you went and ruined everything, didn't you." I bring my hands to her cheeks, running my thumbs over her skin. "Thank Merlin she didn't let me pay her. What a waste that would have been."

She smiles and lets me kiss her. Our lips barely testing each other's. Like we're new at this now. Like different people after this moment, this confession.

What would it feel like to make love to her like this. Open. No bricks or walls.

I tilt my head to hers, ready to find out, and she softly pushes me back. Her eyes are wary, but deep, like velvet. Blue velvet.

"Did you go to New York to forget about me?" she asks, ready for any answer.

I fall into her eyes, like swimming in a velvet-lined jewelry box, storing all my questions and all my heartbeats into her eyes.

"No. To put you back in your box."

She blinks at me, and I lean in to press my soul to hers again.

~*~

Friday, February 24, 1995

"The fuck is this Task about?" Theo says, pulling his mittens on. "Will we get to watch Potter drown today?"

I push through the fifth and sixth years, making space for us in the stands. Pansy is suddenly by my side, even though I didn't remember walking with her. She laces our fingers together as we sit.

"I think they have to dive for something," she says. She leans her head against my shoulder. I sigh.

"I overheard some of the Ravenclaws talking," Daphne says, sitting down with Blaise in front of us. "Cho Chang went to see McGonagall last night and never came back to her dormitory. I think Diggory has to save her from the bottom of the lake."

I smirk. "Let's hope they both drown. Two Seekers out of the way. Oo! And Potter makes three!"

Goyle chuckles heavily.

Pansy says, "So, what? All of their girlfriends are down there? That's so chauvinistic."

Pansy learned a new word this month. She has been saying it as often as possible. Valentine's Day, in particular, is very chauvinistic.

Something slaps the back of my head. I turn to glare and Marcus is grinning at me with his twisted teeth. I smirk back.

"Oi," he says, sitting down. "You all hear? The merpeople stole 'the thing they would miss the most."

I sneer and say, "You think Potter's parents are down there?"

My congregation snickers.

"No, no," Marcus says, "Ron Weasley is Potter's."

I smile at the lake. "Poor Granger. What a hard way to learn her boyfriend's queer."

Theo laughs loudly and awkwardly, slapping his knee.

"Well, they can all drown," Marcus says. "She's down there too. Viktor Krum's slag."

I blink at the water as Pansy gags and starts a diatribe about Krum and Granger. I look to the edge of the lake, and there's Krum in swimming shorts, stretching. I check the stands, and sure enough, she's not there.

Then Daphne's asking the question that I'm too afraid to ask.

"What happens at the end of the hour if they don't rescue them?"

"Well, people have died in the Tournament before, haven't they? Maybe it's not the Champions that don't make it," Pansy says, laughing gleefully.

The whistle blows. And I watch Krum run into the water, splashing and desperate to get to her.

I watch Potter stumble into the lake, taking his sweet time before going underwater.

My hand is wet in Pansy's.

I tear my eyes off the lake and join the conversation again. There's nothing to do for an hour but wait. But at the end of the hour, no one has reappeared. And I wonder if Dumbledore would really let something happen to the Golden Trio.

It's ridiculous really that she be Krum's. They've been on one date. She wouldn't mean enough to him. Does the bastard really have no one else worth saving?

I twitch at every wave in the lake, and when Krum breaks the water with a soggy Gryffindor in his arms, Pansy slips her hand out of mine, shaking out her fingers.

~*~

Wednesday, February 23, 2000

Cornelia Waterstone must die.

I haven't touched Hermione since Monday afternoon. And my fingers are itching.

The bitch sat in on our lunch meeting again yesterday. And I will fire her.

Once I find reason, she's gone.

My lip is almost bleeding from biting the skin as I wait for Granger at the lifts with her coffee cup. The doors ding and she yawns in my face.

I smile at her. "Rough night?"

"Yes."

She takes the coffee from me, and a low hum sings through me when my hand presses against her back as we walk to her office.

I tell her my plan for getting rid of Waterstone: a meeting on the Muggle-born Integration Program today, which does not need her expertise.

She hesitates. "I have the lunch meeting with Viktor today, remember?"

"Ah, yes. Viktor." Lovely.

"Maybe tomorrow?" she asks.

Dr. Flanders is coming in tomorrow…

"I have a meeting tomorrow at lunch. And then I'm out of town on Friday." I scowl at her door. "Are you free tomorrow night?"

And the surprised look she gives reminds me that we don't see each other outside the office or bookstores. This weekend is the first time.

Would she want to go to dinner with me? Is it too public for what we are? Maybe I could take her someplace no one will see us. Nepal. Or Antarctica.

"Er… I guess so," she says, and then changes her mind. "I mean, er, no. I'm not, actually. But I am free tonight."

Fuck.

"Tonight is no good for me." I twist my lips. "I'll figure something out."

I want to lean into her, just press my lips lightly to her skin. But I settle for tapping a finger on her hip, the place I like to press bruises into when she won't stop squirming under me.

She licks her lips as I walk away.

Kelsey, Mockridge's associate, grins at me as I walk past.

"Mind your own business, Miss Perkins," I hum.

"Of course, Mr. Malfoy," she chuckles.

After lunch, I hear a commotion on the floor, and I stick my head out to find Viktor Krum holding court with my staff. Wentworth and Walter have sucked him into a Quidditch discussion, and Granger stands to the side, looking at her mail. I slide up next to her.

"How was your date?" I whisper.

She grins, ignoring my jab. "Excellent. He'll be joining us next week for the media coverage. And he's very interested in the project, thank you very much. I didn't have to show him my tits or anything."

Oh, she hilarious. A fucking comedian.

"Great news, Granger," I hiss.

Krum appears and butchers her name like he always does, and then turns to me with a "Hello, Malfoy."

His face is tight. Which is wonderful. It means he knows I stand in the way.

"Krum," I say, shaking his hand. "We're so glad to have your support."

"Yes," Krum mumbles. "Anything for Harmany."

He takes her hand and kisses her knuckles.

Krum has gotten more skin contact from her in the past hour than I have in two days. And it boils me. He sends me a raised brow as his lips pull away.

Oh, wonderful. Another name to add to my kill list.

She walks him downstairs. I wait for her to return, fumbling through mail.

The lift opens and she tries to dodge me.

"I don't like your Bulgarian," I say.

I look to her, and she her jaw opens and her eyes narrow.

"I had to put up with yours. I lived," she says. And flounces off to her office.

I crack my neck, and drum my fingers on Melody's counter for a moment before taking a walk around the floor.

Touché, darling.

~*~

I have to admit. Denims are comfortable.

I walked into a Muggle shop in London, flashed a smile at the salesgirl, and had her dress me for a vacation.

Thankfully the store is on the higher end, so there are no palm trees on my buttoned shirt. I have her remove the tags, and walk back to the Apparition point in my new jeans. Once the Muggle-Repelling Charm washes over me, I reach into my bag for my "props" and grab the seashell Portkey at 8:29PM, and wait.

A minute later I'm tugged through space with salt on my tongue, arriving in an alley in bright sunlight with a view of some strange structure that is oddly beautiful. I look down at my tourist's map, and see "Sydney Opera House."

Lovely. I'll have to pick up a brochure.

I spend a few hours walking in the summer air (finding a place for espresso too) and bringing this Muggle camera to my face like I see other Muggles do. They are able to make it flash, but I haven't the foggiest how to do that. Must be professionals.

Just before nine, I wander over to a small storefront, just in time to see a woman with hair the color of brown sugar and a man with wiry curls approaching with the keys to unlock. They're chattering about something he read in the newspaper. She's rolling her eyes at him.

I smile.

Merlin, her mother is beautiful. Some kind of quiet grace that would never stand out against my mother or her friends, but a simple, domestic beauty. Her father looks a bit too much like Weasley for my taste. He's gangly and tall and his features have freckled in the Australia sun.

At least I had the decency to fall for someone the physical polar-opposite of my mother, unlike some Oedipal-scar-headed sods I know…

I turn through a few storefronts until five past the hour. I take deep breath and make a show of looking to see if they're open.

When I open the door, she's already smiling at me from behind the counter. "Good morning."

"Good morning, Miss," I say, looking around. "Are you open? I don't mean to intrude—"

"Yes, yes, we are!" She says, pulling candies and brownies from the drawers below. "Miss," she hums under her breath, chuckling at my compliment.

"And you're a sweets shop?" I ask.

Mr. Wilkins appears from the back room, an apron on his waist and flour on his hands already.

"Yes," he says with a grin. "Sweet Tooth. My, are you a Brit?"

"I am," I say with an open grin. "It sounds like you are, too."

"Where are you from?" he asks, picking up a towel to clean his hands, something methodical about it. Like he's used to cleaning his hands quickly and fully.

"Wiltshire," I say. "And you?"

"Hampstead," he says. "We moved down here about two years ago." And then he leans across the counter, holding his hand out. "Wendell Wilkins."

I stare at his hand, and spend half a second dizzy with the lie. With the disappointment that he finds me acceptable. That he would even like me. And it wasn't actually me.

"Drake Mallory," I say. Dr. Flanders said to keep everything close enough with the hope of a trigger.

"This is my wife, Monica."

I shake her hand. Skin soft.

"What brings you down here, Drake?" Monica asks me, opening the register and starting the daily count.

"It's my honeymoon," I say.

"Oh, how lovely!"

"But I'm alone, unfortunately." I grimace.

"Oh," Monica stops. "Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that."

I shrug. "It's alright. I thought I would take the trip regardless. I've never been down under."

Wendell bends and plucks a piece of dark chocolate from the glass. "For your heart. On the house." He smiles at me as he places the paper-wrapped piece on the counter. "They say chocolate keeps the darkness away."

I stare at him. Wondering if that's something she told them. If they knew anything about Dementors before.

"Thank you," I choke out. "I've… I've heard that too."

"How long are you in Sydney?" she asks, and she brushes her hair out of her eyes like her daughter does.

"Just until Saturday morning," I say. "I have a few tours scheduled today, and then tomorrow I'm going to just try to eat my way through Sydney." I laugh. "Do you have any recommendations for a party of one?"

I flash Monica a grin, and she blinks. And just as I planned, she says, "You can come to ours." She turns to Wendell. "For dinner."

My mouth opens, and I start to decline. Wendell says, "Absolutely. We'd love to have a fellow Brit over. We need an update on the weather. Like, has it ever not rained?"

He grins at me. And I spy two large front teeth.

I smile back at them. I buy a pound of chocolate. I ask for a good breakfast spot. I ask Monica about the book I see peeking out from under the register, and watch as she brightens and tells me the plot of the murder-mystery novel.

I wave goodbye to them. And head back to the transportation point, pulling another Portkey.

~*~

Thursday, February 24, 2000

OLD FLAMES BURN BRIGHTER
By Rita Skeeter

I look over the picture of Krum's lips on hers. It feels like it's been days since he came to the office, but it was yesterday. It's been days for me.

I watch as he leans in again, kissing each cheek and then once on her lips.

She puckers for him. I swear I can see it.

I hear the lift ding. I hear heels on the carpets. I hear the office door click closed.

"'Old Flames Burn Brighter.'"

I fold the paper down and watch her jump to see me leaning on her desk.

It was very difficult finding bricks this morning. They crumbled and cracked in my haste to bury her.

And now that she's here, I struggle between falling to my knees and begging her to stay with me, and burning the building to the ground.

Just the order to do it in, really.

"What can I help you with, Mr. Malfoy?" she hums.

She grins at me, like her mother. Only her smile is teasing me. Like I have nothing to worry about. Like it's commonplace for us to kiss others in the paper.

And it is.

I look down again instead of watching her self-satisfied smirk. I hear her move close to me. And then the paper disappears and her lips are on mine. Slow and sweet.

And I can't stop my arm from twining around her, like a vine, curling into place on the stones. She opens her mouth under my lips, pressing into me, her stomach against mine. I hold her face, tasting her slowly, beckoning her back to me.

She whispers into my mouth, "I like our flame better."

And that's all I need to hear really. She hasn't denied anything. But she's made it clear it doesn't matter.

I feel a smile tugging at my cheeks, and I look over her shoulder. "I have a meeting in five minutes, or else I'd offer to pound you into this desk."

"Hmm," she breathes. "That's a shame." And then she reaches behind me for her coffee cup, pressing her torso into line with mine, her breasts firm on my chest.

I think of how long it's been since I've touched her skin, since we've come together, since her body has trembled in my arms.

I look down at her smirk. At her intelligent eyes.

Scheming really.

I remember my scan of the financials that morning.

"This week's installment of the inheritance transferred yesterday. It's usually on Tuesday evenings, but it was yesterday, at 8AM." I search her wary eyes. "You don't know anything about that, though, do you Granger?"

She sips her coffee slowly, smile tight. And I remember how exhausted she was yesterday. Like she'd had a full day before coming into the office. And I know it's a lie when she says, "Maybe your father wants to give it to you after all?"

And wonder if I'd rather have honesty or loyalty. Because she's a liar and a cheat when it comes to this inheritance. And I think I can only have one.

"Maybe." I brush her hair over her ear, like her mother does.

I kiss her cheek, then her other, imitating Viktor Krum's clumsy movements. And she's smiling at the joke when I press against her lips again.

I slip away from her, smiling at her smile, and go to greet Dr. Flanders at the elevator.

We sit and chat for a few hours about how tomorrow will go.

~*~

Friday, February 25, 2000

Sweet Tooth closes at 7PM. So, at 8AM in the U.K., Dr. Flanders and I spin away on a Portkey.

I meet Wendell and Monica at Sweet Tooth as they're closing. They drive me back to their little house just outside of Sydney, and I set a tracking spell on my wand so Dr. Flanders can follow my location.

We have dinner.

I ask them if they have any children, and Monica replies that they'd always wanted children, but it just never happened for them.

I ask where they went to university, and something flickers in Wendell's face, like he couldn't remember for a moment. And then abruptly responds that he hadn't.

I ask how long they've been baking, and together they respond, "Twenty-five years."

She was thorough. I get through every question Dr. Flanders gave me, and they never respond with, "Hm, I don't quite remember."

This would take a while. Dr. Flanders warned me. But this was deep.

After dinner, a knock on their front door. Wendell and Monica frown at each other, excusing themselves. They hadn't expected company. I slip my wand into my robe sleeve.

"Hello, how can we help you?" Wendell says. And I wonder if that's how he would have opened the door for Yaxley. Or if she'd taken away a certain amount of shrewd carefulness as well.

I stand from the table.

Dr. Flanders casts a Confundus Charm on Wendell, and I hit Monica in the back with another. It feels dirty, like a *Crucio*.

Wendell stumbles a little, blinking. And Monica leans against a door frame.

"Hello, Wendell," Dr. Flanders says. "My name is Henry."

Wendell blinks slowly. "Hello."

"May I come in?" Henry smiles.

"Yes, please." Monica gestures and she falls a bit. I grab her arm, remembering her daughter slipping in an alleyway, drugged and dizzy. I swallow my bile and remind myself that this is a proven process.

Wendell and Monica sit together on the couch, blinking slowly at Dr. Flanders.

I sit next to Monica. She still holds my arm.

"Wendell, Monica," Dr. Flanders begins. "My name is Henry. I'm a doctor. You were in an accident two and a half years ago. And I'm here to help you remember things you've forgotten."

Wendell's head tilts slowly. "An accident?"

"Of sorts," Dr. Flanders smiles.

Monica's head turns to me. "Do you know him?" she asks me slowly.

"I do," I say. "And I trust him."

She nods, lifting her brows.

Dr. Flanders gestures to me. This is the part where I'm supposed to exploit a flaw in the memory charm. But I found so few.

"Wendell," I say. "Where did you go to university?"

"I didn't." He stares at me. His answer is quicker now.

"Where did you meet Monica?" I ask.

"At university," he responds. He looks down at his hands, lips parting. He stares at Monica, and she stares back. "Did I meet you at university?"

"I think so." She's squeezing my arm.

"Monica where did you go to university?" Dr. Flanders asks.

And he begins a series of questions designed to falter their thoughts. It's repetitive. And then, after the sixth time Wendell is asked where he went to university, he tells us he went to dentistry school.

Wendell and Monica stare at each other, the Confundus Charm starting to fade.

Dr. Flanders casts a calming spell over them. And I watch as he asks them about what they remember from the year 1979.

~*~

After eight hours, they remember they had a daughter.

It breaks Monica in half when she remembers giving birth, but nothing after that.

Wendell can remember Hermione as a toddler. A two-year-old with curls running into desks and toppling chairs.

I keep making coffee. Dr. Flanders told me that the first session needs to be productive, or else nothing will stick. So, we're up all night.

Dr. Flanders will stay in Australia for the next two weeks, sleeping in their guest room. At 5AM, the Wilkins move to their bedroom, finally allowed to sleep. Dr. Flanders takes the guest room. And I sleep on the couch.

I wake up at 7:30 to Monica Wilkins sitting on the coffee table, looking down on me.

"Who are you?" she asks.

The charms have worn off. And any distrust they would naturally have of this situation has seeped back into her.

I sit up slowly. "I'm a friend of your daughter's."

"Hermione," she confirms.

"Yes, Hermione."

She stares at me, eyes bloodshot. "Drake. Drake Mallory."

"I gave you a fake name, actually," I say, running a hand through my hair.

"Blonde," she whispers, gazing at my hair.

I stare at her, waiting for her continue. Waiting for her to finish whatever thought she started.

"Draco Malfoy," she says, like a prayer she used to recite as a child.

My heart beat stalls in my chest. My face tingles.

I watch as her hand reaches out and turns a lock of hair behind my ear.

"She used to talk about you. And your hair."

I swallow. Something crosses her face, and her head rears back, fingers at her temples like a sudden migraine. I help her back to her bedroom where Wendell is sleeping.

In the morning, she calls me Drake again. And asks again if I know her daughter.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Content Warning for minor character death

Saturday, May 2, 1998

It's hot in this part of the castle. Like the energy leaving the bodies burns through the air before dissipating.

Several Death Eaters pass, yelling at me to follow, saying they've seen Potter come this way. I tell them I'm on my own mission.

It's true.

I saw her hair whipping through the corridors as the students gathered in the Great Hall. I was close enough to see Weasley's freckles for a moment.

It was foolish of me to think that she wouldn't be here for this. For the end of it.

If Potter fails… I'll try to get to her first. Presuming she's not dead already. The thought digs into my side. I'll try to end up with her, try to keep her from entering the pool of people to be sold. I need to find her, keep her in sight. And if the Dark Lord drops Potter, I'll take her then. Steal her like a diamond necklace in the night.

I turn a hallway, look both ways to make sure it's empty, and start north.

"Draco."

I spin and Blaise steps out from a hidden place behind a statue. He holds his wand at an angle, like he's not going to trust me.

"What are you still doing here?" I ask. He left with Pansy and Daphne.

"Where are you going?" he asks instead.

"I'm on my own mission."

"Under whose orders?"

I stare at him. Is it worth it to lie? What if this is our last conversation?

He nods at my silence, and says, "Where's Vin and Greg?"

"Somewhere downstairs."

"And you?" He steps toward me. "You're alright?"

"I'm walking, aren't I?" I look him over. He doesn't have a spot of dirt or blood on him. And if I checked his wand, not a spell would have been cast. A survivor. "What are you still doing here?" I ask again.

"Pansy tried to come back for you. I told her I'd go instead if she promised to stay put."

I squint my eyes at him. "And to find me, you've been waiting for me to pass through this corridor?"

"No," he says, pocketing his wand. "I've been following Hermione Granger. Knew you'd come along."

Ice in my chest. I blink at him, wondering if it's worth the effort. We'll all be dead soon, won't we? So, I nod at him. "Where did you last see her?"

He frowns at me.

"Leave with me, Draco."

"You found her?"

"Daphne and Pansy are at the Hogwarts Express platform. We're going to wait for the dust to settle and figure out what to do—"

"Tell me—"

"You can't do this—"

"Watch me."

He steps into me and grabs my shoulders. "She's not yours to keep safe!" He shakes me. "Look around you, Draco! There are bigger things happening. *She* is not looking for *you!"*

I feel a crack forming between my eyes. Like a sliver in a dam, holding too much pressure for too long.

"If you're not going to help me—"

"She must have a cunt of gold if you really can't see—"

My shoulders snap, jerking out of his hands. He stumbles back and my wand is in his face before he rights himself.

He stares down the end of my wand.

"You've made promises to each other then?" he confirms for himself, nodding. "I'm sorry. I didn't know."

I blink at him, my fingers tightening on my wand. "We've made no promises. We… There is no 'we."

He stares at me. "This isn't a game for you though? Not a bit of fun before settling down with Pansy?"

Something wet rolls down my face. I pray that it's blood. "No," I say. "This… hasn't been fun for me." I lower my wand. "It's one-sided. She's not looking for me."

He just nods. And I don't have to ask again.

"I saw her and Weasley moving toward the second floor girls' bathroom," he says.

I jerk my head as a goodbye. I take off down the hall.

"Draco."

I spin back for him.

"I have 10,000. Probably more if we sell the vineyard." He shrugs. "It's yours."

I swallow and nod at him. "If I don't find you at the end, tell Pansy you never saw me."

I spin on my heel before I can thank him or say something meaningful about our friendship or beg him to come with me.

~*~

Saturday, February 26, 2000

I stay well after midnight the next day in Australia.

I head to Sweet Tooth in the morning to post a notice that the shop is closed for a week, and before I leave I place a few protective enchantments to keep any unsavory characters away.

Monica locks herself in the bathroom when the memory of an eight-year-old breaking her wrist pops through the haze and swarms her mind unbidden, with no other memories of her daughter to accompany it.

Wendell sits next to the bathroom door, whispering through the wood, and Dr. Flanders and I take a break to make lunch.

We haven't introduced magic yet. So, we can't open the door.

Dr. Flanders says we should save any magic for when they have grasped the first ten years. Only introduce them to Hogwarts and wizardry when they chronologically were introduced to it.

It's brilliant, really. But I just want to make a fucking pot of tea. And I don't know what these knobs and dials are for on this oven.

I couldn't tell the British Ministry exactly when I'd be coming back, so I have to go to the Australian Ministry for a Portkey. It's almost dawn when I finally find the statue outside of the Opera House, and follow the stairs down into the hidden Ministry.

I land on the moors outside the Manor in a bright sunset, and the time change hits me like a Bludger. I stumble for a moment, and once I can tell the difference between the ground and the sky, I start the trek up the stone path to the Manor.

To Hermione.

But first… Pepper-Up Potion. And a wash.

Once I'm fully awake again, I wander to the library, like a kite being reeled in.

She's deep in the stacks, nose stuck in an old volume that looks like it will fall apart in her fingers.

Her hair is down. And her dress is smooth and light against her waist and hips.

I can see them in her, more clearly now. Her mother's eyes. Her father's chin. Monica's graceful movements with Wendell's jerky thoughts pulling his body in all directions.

It seems unfair that she hasn't seen them in two and a half years, and I made dinner for them hours ago.

She turns her long neck and finds me watching her. I smirk.

"Didn't your mother ever teach you it isn't polite to stare?" She grins back at me.

"She tried," I say. "But she also told me to enjoy the beautiful things in life, so I find it a very difficult contradiction."

She blushes, and I take a moment to drink her in.

Hermione Granger in the Malfoy library, radiantly happy.

"Interesting finds?"

"Mm-hmm. In fact, I'm almost positive that if I'd had access to the Malfoy library over the past ten years, Voldemort wouldn't have had a chance."

She smiles down at the book in her hands, and I gravitate closer to her. "Well, the next time a dark wizard comes along, I'll make sure you have everything you need. What are you reading now?"

I stand just behind her, looking down over her shoulder. And I can see a hint of her breasts in the dress. She's answering me, but I'm focused on the scent of her after so many days without her. Feels like months.

I brush her hair off her shoulder, steadying myself on her hip. My cheek rests against hers. And I think we could read like this. Maybe in the bath or in the window seat. She could huff when she was done reading a page and had to wait for me to finish.

She shivers. And my hand rubs against her hip, now thinking of other things we could do in the bath or the window seat.

She mumbles something about the book. Something about research and the best way to do things. And I watch her fingers tighten on the book.

I wonder how much time we have before dinner.

And then I realize I don't care.

I press my lips along her neck, and she leans back into me, tilting her head for me. I trail my fingers down her arms, slipping over her elbow. My eyes slide over the Table of Contents, and I flip to the next page for her.

"Why don't you read me the Preface?"

Maybe I'll quiz her on it later with my tongue inside of her. She'd fucking *love* that. I'll give her House points and only let her come when she reaches one hundred.

She takes a deep breath and reads, her voice washing over me. I hold her waist, rubbing against her hipbones. She pauses, and I tell her to continue.

I sprinkle light kisses on her neck, and slide my hand up her ribs until I'm almost at her breast. She stutters, and stops whatever she was reading about the portraits at Beauxbatons.

"What did the portraits have to say, Granger?"

I watch her nipples tighten through her thin dress. I wonder if my voice turns her on like hers does to me.

A small sound presses through her throat, and she continues, "Um…'tales of young Nicolas and his adventures at school. But some of them had seen him since. Some of them"—I cup her left breast ignoring her aching nipple, and gather the fabric of her dress up her thigh —"Some of them had seen Nicolas Flamel and his w-wife as recently as 1798, putting the Fl-flamels at around four-hundred-years-old."

I'm under her dress, inching towards her knickers and she can't focus on the Flamels any longer. My fingers dance across her and she moans when I nip at her neck. I run my other hand over her breast, rolling her nipple over her dress.

"Four-hundred-years-old is very old, isn't it, Granger?" I prompt her. And when she agrees and gasps, I dip into her knickers and slide my fingers through her. Already soaked. Her neck is tilted open to me, and I see that my love bites have faded since I last saw her. I pluck at her nipple and sigh, "What else does it say," setting to work on marking her again.

"I – I can't, Draco. Please."

Neither can I. I slip a finger inside of her, shaking at how tight she still is. My cock twitches against her backside, and I pull her close as she leans back against me, head on my shoulder. I fuck her with one finger until she moans. My other hand slips under her dress, reaching across her chest to get inside her bra. My wrist twists until I can thumb at her clit.

"Oh, god. Draco."

I love the way she says that.

I slip another finger inside of her and she trembles. Her hips jerk, and she rubs against my cock, so tight against me I think I can feel myself slipping in between her cheeks.

Would she let me fuck her like this? Just pull her dress up and shove aside her knickers and then I'd be inside of her. I'll tell her it's just like at Cornerstone, just lean forward on the stacks there, Granger.

She drops the book, and her hands try to grab for something. My wrists, my neck. She's groaning so beautifully every time I push my fingers inside.

"Put your hands on the shelves," I whisper against her jaw. And when she obeys a fever runs through my chest, shivering down to my cock.

She likes the way my fingers shift inside of her with it, and I like the way her arse pushes against me.

My hips push back, rubbing my cock just right. Even with my trousers still on I'm sure I'll come soon.

If I get her off first, maybe she'll let me just slip inside like this.

I look up to see her hands squeezing the wooden shelves, and I close my eyes, grunting, "Fuck." Her hips push back, slamming herself onto my fingers. "I've wanted this… Wanted this every time I saw you in the Hogwarts library."

Wanted her to want me as much as she wanted those books.

Her cunt contracts on my fingers, and she moans, "Please, Draco."

I hold onto her hip with one hand, the other still inside of her, twisting on her clit and pulling her against me. She's moving too fast. Fucking herself on me, teasing my cock with her perfect arse, and her perfect moans.

I can't wait to be inside of her, so I hold her still as I thrust against her backside, thumbing her clit and watching her hands on the shelves.

I hear a crack, and I wonder if she's broken the shelves. The thought is just enough to make me come. I feel the tipping point—

"Mippy is telling you that dinner is ready."

My brain needs a few seconds to catch up, but my cock immediately knows what's happened, backing off.

She's stiff as a board, and I slip my fingers out of her, and say, "Thank you, Mippy. We'll be there shortly."

A *crack* as she disappears.

She laughs and I drop my sweating forehead onto her neck.

"Fuck."

She cackles.

There must be a spell to keep House Elves from doing that. Someone must have thought of it.

She slips out of my grasp, and I steady myself on the shelf to my left. She turns and kisses me.

"Give me a moment," I say.

She blinks at me and slides her hand down my chest. "Do you want me to…"

I grab her wrist and say, "No, I'm… I really don't want to come with Mippy's voice in my head."

She giggles, and kisses my lips again.

When I finally make it to the dinner table, Mother gives me a disapproving eyebrow. And I glare back at her.

Probably forced the poor elf to interrupt.

Mippy can't make eye contact with me for the rest of dinner.

I count down the minutes before we're standing from the table, saying our goodbyes. I lead her through the entrance hall, and up the stairs, taking her hand. She stops a few times, and I remember she's never been up this way. I let her look out over the pond and the peacocks.

When we reach my door, I'm struck with a sudden fear. Is my room clean enough? When did Mippy last change the sheets? Have I hidden away anything I don't want her to see?

I look down at her, bracing myself before opening the door for her.

She steps inside, looks around briefly, and laughs.

I frown. "What?"

She smiles at me and says, "It's just all very predictable. I love it."

I look around as she steps inside, and realize that yes, the green and silver were maybe a bit too childish.

She wanders, and I trail close behind her, watching her face, watching her fingers. They mark the things she's interested in. She looks carefully at my bookcase, and I *knew* there was something I wanted to clean up for her. I should have slipped in more nonfiction and biographies and theoretical magic.

She smiles at my books, and I wonder if she's teasing me.

When she peeks into the bathroom suite, her eyes sparkle, and I wonder about that bath…

She finds my closet, and thumbs through my cloaks and trousers while I lean in the doorway.

"We need to get you into some oranges and pinks." She winks.

She teases me, but maybe it's a joke I'm in on.

She moves to the drawers, and it hits me that, yes, there *was* something I needed to hide. The knickers from our first time could be explained maybe. Even the *Prophet* pictures could be shrugged off. But the pictures of us in the alley that Father's spies took would be harder to justify.

She looks to me and I must be incredibly open for her to read in my face that she needs to step away from the drawers.

She presses herself against me, hands sliding up and into my hair. She kisses me and I pull her close. She slips into my mouth and I slip down to grab her backside.

"I like your bedroom, Draco." Reassuring me. And it's such a relief that she can read me. That I don't need these walls. That she and I could possibly understand each other with our eyes for the next forever.

I kiss her, smiling, but she pulls back and looks down at her shoes.

"I have a surprise for you."

"Oh, really," I say, thinking of all the surprises I have in store for her once we get on the mattress. How many hours I'll spend on her.

"Yes, I think… I think you'll like it."

I smile. You silly witch. Of course, I will.

"When do I get my surprise," I say, squeezing at her.

"You'll need to, um… give me some space," she mumbles, and I smile and release her. I move to the bed, sitting on the edge.

She unzips her dress, and I already like my surprise.

I watch as the shoulders drop and reveal a green bra. Slytherin green.

I feel my throat dry as the dress drops to the floor. Green knickers too.

These are new. These are just for me. I know Hermione Granger would never in her life purposefully buy green underthings for herself.

She looks nervous, like she's unsure I like her in this. So, I stand and take charge. "Get on the bed."

She smiles, proud of herself, biting her lip as she passes me, and my eyes drop to backside to find… very little.

These Muggles. They know what they're doing.

Her cheeks are perfectly framed with just a scrap of green fabric disappearing between them. The witch literally makes my knees weak as I grab for the bedpost.

She crawls across my bed, her arse in the air, long legs dragging along the comforter. I watch the muscles in her thighs, the dip of the knickers against her cunt, the cheeks that I want to bite into.

She stops in the center of the bed. "Like this?"

I look up and she's turned over her shoulder, and I know I have to have her on all fours in my bed one day, turning her head to watch me as I fuck her.

"Lay down," I tell her. And she obeys. And I wonder if one day she'll let me tell her exactly what to do. If she'd give me one night of pulling her wrists above her head and giving her instructions to obey.

She presses her knees together as I take my things off. I hesitate with my trousers, and decide to keep them on for now.

I crawl up to her, kissing her knees as she watches me. They fall open and I kiss up to her knickers. Fuck. I want to fuck her with these on.

I kiss her over them. And her head falls back. My lips press against her, promising things to her, and I drag my tongue over the green lace, pressing hard against her clit.

"Fuck… Draco."

And maybe making her talk about the Giant Squid was the wrong thing. If she curses while I eat her out, that's worth everything.

"Say it again."

She says my name, and while I love it, I wait for her to say "fuck" again.

I smile and kiss her cunt. She moans and says, "Oh, fuck."

A chorus of fucks when I pull her knickers aside and lap at her. I twitch in my trousers. She grabs at my hair, and I twist my arm under her thigh, pressing her open. She tastes just as perfect as before.

She bucks against me and my tongue slides further inside of her.

"Oh, fuck, Draco."

I move to her clit, pressing quick firm strokes, and the noises she keens ring in my ears. She pulls my face into her, jerking her hips against me, and my own hips shift against the mattress, searching for something warm and wet.

She releases my head, and I suck in air, watching her fingers twist in the comforter.

I want to feel her come. I want to memorize the way her muscles grip me.

"Let me know when you're close."

I dip my head back to her, and she watches me for as long as she can before her head falls back. Her hips jump at me again, and I push her thighs down.

"I think… I think I'm … Draco."

I look up at her and she's got her hands on her breasts, rubbing herself. That fucking green bra.

I groan and it shakes her. "Fuck," she grunts.

Merlin, I love that.

Two of my fingers slide inside of her, opening her, and she sighs for more. I latch onto her clit and suck.

Her thighs try to close on my head. Her walls flutter around my fingers, and then clench as she cries out.

I work her down, slow pumping of my fingers, light lapping of my tongue.

When she opens her eyes again, she looks down and says, "Fuck."

Vixen.

I kiss up her stomach, kissing her breasts through the bra, but I stop when I reach for her lips.

Pansy hated this. She made me wipe my mouth or even brush my teeth before I could kiss her again.

"Can I kiss you like this?"

I watch her hesitate, and when she agrees, I know she's unsure so I smile and wipe my mouth before kissing her skin again. My body leans heavily on her, my hips pressing into her. She

reaches for my buckle, and I just can't believe she's mine.

Then she rolls us over, and I laugh at our elbows and knees. She kisses my mouth and I press my tongue to hers, wondering if she tastes herself.

She kisses down my neck and chest, pausing over my nipples, testing to see if I like it. I grin at her and she frowns, like she's trying to find the right spell.

Her eyes flicker back to mine, wide and questioning as she kisses my stomach, and I'm trying to figure out what it is she's doing when her tongue slides against my abdomen.

She couldn't…

Air leaves me. I watch her as she continues lower.

She… She wouldn't want to.

She blinks up at me and her hands move to my buttons, lips inching below my bellybutton. I jump up, grabbing her wrists.

"You don't have to." My voice is hoarse from swallowing her down, and I wonder if she thinks we need to be even. That's not…

"You don't want me to?" She's confused, asking me to clarify why I wouldn't want her mouth on me.

And I have no fucking clue why I wouldn't. Or how I could explain to her how badly I want it. So badly that I can't guarantee I wouldn't hurt her. That I wouldn't thrust into her throat and pour into her, fisting her hair so she couldn't move.

The way I want it isn't the way she should do the first time.

I've said nothing, so she kisses my stomach again, and continues to unbutton me. I fall back and stare at my ceiling as she slides my trousers down, and I try not to think of how many times I've stared up at this ceiling thinking of her lips around my cock.

I feel my pulse between my legs, and I press my eyes together, prepared to hold back, prepared to keep my hands to myself.

When she hasn't touched me, I open my eyes to see her staring down at the bulge in my trunks, like waiting for it to reveal its true intentions.

I sit up again, hands on her shoulders. "We don't—There's so many things I want to do tonight. Every night. We can try that later."

She nods, visibly relieved, blushing at her failure. I kiss her deeply, convincing her that I want her. I think of something else, something she can accomplish.

Something we can utilize this bed for.

"Can we do something else instead?" I ask, and she nods.

I take off my trousers and trunks fully, and watch as her eyes jump to my cock, as if imagining how blow jobs actually work.

I'll teach you one day, love.

We take her knickers and heels off, but once she reaches for her bra I stop her. "No, I never want you to take that off."

She smiles. And I lay on top of her, bringing her legs around me before spinning us until she's on top.

"Can we try like this?" I ask through her wild curls falling over us.

She sits up, looking confused. "I… don't know how to…"

"Let's figure it out."

I help her sit over me, and guide myself into her. She closes her eyes to concentrate on taking me, and I watch my cock slip inside of her.

Oh, Merlin.

Her in that green bra, sinking down me. Of all the fantasies I've had in this bed, I don't think that was imagined.

I squeeze my eyes shut, waiting to bottom out inside of her as her walls clench around me.

Of all the fantasies I've had in this bed, coming after two seconds was not imagined either.

She starts to move, and I have to watch. She lifts up, trying to find a good way to do this, and I almost help her but then she's flipping her hair over her shoulder and I definitely remember that part from my fantasies.

I grab her hips, and just lay back and watch her figure it out. Watch Hermione Granger solve a problem.

It's fascinating and exhilarating.

I reach up for her breast when she gets the hang of it, and she leans down on me, changing the angle. She bucks against me, and I take a moment to breathe.

She continues with that thought, jerking her hips into mine, and I'm groaning as I rub at her tits and let her fuck me.

She falls to her elbows, hips moving in a quick pace, her hair everywhere. And I find I don't have to help her at all.

I hold her hips as she searches for her own pleasure, using me. Her face is open and lips panting air.

She ruts against me, little moans pouring out of her, and I let her fuck me, just like I've always imagined. Taking control and knowing exactly what to do.

She goes faster, fucking herself on my cock. And my hips jump, meeting hers.

"Granger, yes," I whine. "Oh, fuck yes."

I hold her hip and bring my other hand to her clit. She gasps, and I continue to press up into her. Her thighs open wider, and she drops lower, moaning. I rub at her clit, feeling her flutter.

She grabs my face and kisses me, her curls in my mouth as we press our tongues together. Her hips keep snapping in small movements, searching for her climax.

She pulls up tall, and I get to watch her run her hand through her hair, panting hard in a green bra.

I get to pretend it's the Slytherin dormitories, and she's snuck in to fuck me.

She rolls her hips, bringing her hands to her breasts.

Goddess. She's so powerful like this. I'm just a side note in this story. She rides me, beginning to bounce on me, her tits jiggling, her thighs trembling. And I grab her hips and do my best to keep up. Try to touch her. Try to fuck her.

But she barely needs me as her hips slam down on me, using me to get off, trusting me to do the same.

Her cunt contracts, and her jaw drops open in a silent scream. She can't move as her body bends in bliss.

I roll us, feeling her walls holding me, and then I'm fucking her into the mattress, my face in her hair, her thighs around my hips.

"Fucking fuck," I groan into her neck, my hips pounding her, and it's so much better than my desk at work. Her cunt flutters, still going, and I don't want it to stop for her. I'll keep this pace forever if it means she's still coming.

Then her hands run into my hair, fingers gripping me as she yells out, honey dripping out of her between us, and I bite her neck to keep from screaming. *She* screams. And I'm grunting something into her, my hips fucking her, snapping deep. I feel her clamp down on me, and I come with a yell, her walls pulling at me in waves.

It feels like it lasts forever, pouring into her, breathing air from her. She moans into my ear and scratches at my back, and it feels like she comes again.

"I can't… oh, my god. I can't breathe."

I pull back and watch as she pants, staring into my eyes. Her walls pull at me and her eyelids flutter. She's beautiful and blissed and breathless.

She moans for me to come back to her when I slide out. I chuckle, and kiss at her chest, and whisper into her skin, "You're the most perfect thing in the world."

I turn us over, laying on my back with her in my arms. She rests for a moment, and then tugs her bra off, tossing it away. She presses her naked body along mine, throwing her leg over my thigh and dropping her head onto my chest.

"I'm coming back," she says. "For the bed."

"Just the bed?"

"And your mother, of course. The bed. And your mother."

"And the library."

"And the library. The bed, your mother, and the library."

I smile at the ceiling.

I never imagined this part. Never fantasized about her staying the night.

I trail my fingers up her arm, rounding her shoulder and back down, steering clear of the white scars on her forearm spelling a word I don't use any more. "My mother was very glad to have you over."

She hums, "I'm very glad to be friends with her again. I missed her."

I swallow, thinking of her without a mother for so long. And mine instructed to stay away. I confess, "That was my fault, I'm afraid. I told her to stay away from you. After your visit to Azkaban. After she miscalculated her control over my father." I feel her stiffen in my arms. "I'm sorry. I told her not to contact you again."

"Oh," she says. "I'm actually quite glad to hear that. She's the closest thing I feel I have to a mother. So, I'm glad to hear she hadn't given up on me."

Another stab to my chest. I hold her closer. "I'm sorry." She kisses my arm, accepting my apology. But I can't think of anything but Monica Wilkins sobbing in the bathroom, thinking there was a girl out there who needed her. "Have you ever gone down to Australia?"

"To… to see my parents?" I nod. "No. No, I don't… I don't really think I'd want to see them if they didn't remember me. If I had to pretend to be someone else."

I swallow, praying that Dr. Flanders has made progress. I slide my fingers across her arm, lulling her to sleep. "Have you looked into counter-curses?"

"A little bit," she says. "There's not been any success with reversing memory charms that deep. Removing an event is easy. You can recover it over time. But removing a person… It's

too many events."

Exactly. Exactly as Dr. Flanders described. It seemed she had just never taken the next step to speak to a specialist. Probably too afraid of failure.

A calm happiness pours over me, suddenly very proud that I've done this for her. The beginning steps she couldn't take, I took for her.

"I'm sorry you had to do that." I don't elaborate.

"I know." She's drifting off to sleep, but I have to finish. I have to get it out.

My hand strokes down her arm as I say, "And I'm sorry I was on that mission. The one at your house."

"It's fine," she mumbles.

Sweet relief burns over me. I shouldn't have apologized while she was asleep, but I had to.

I part my lips, about to confess. To say: *I was there to save you. I was there to save them.*

"You wouldn't have hurt them," she hums. "I saw it on your face."

I guess that's enough. That she knows deep down that I wouldn't have hurt them.

She tumbles into sleep. And I stare at the ceiling, running my fingers over her arm.

I listen to her breathe.

I feel her air across my skin.

I saw it on your face.

I frown at the ceiling.

You wouldn't have hurt them. I saw it on your face.

Was she there? My chest tightens. Was she that close to danger that day?

Under Potter's Invisibility Cloak maybe?

No. Greyback would have scented them.

I almost rustle her to ask. To clarify.

But she was confused. She had to ask me why my blood was on her walls. She saw something on my face that day?

My eyes dance over my canopy curtains, wisping down from the tall bedposts. Wisping like memories.

My skin hardens. A chill running across the planes, tingling my face, tightening my toes. The muscles in my throat solidify, like choking on poured concrete.

It was impossible.

I saw it on your face.

I think back to the way I ran for her, desperate. The way I blasted open her bedroom door, searching every inch of the space for signs of her. The weight of the marble in my pocket, ready to take us away.

I saw it on your face.

I drag in a breath through a closed airway. The weight of her is too heavy on me. I peel myself from her, looking anywhere but the body in bed as I find my boxers.

It wouldn't be the first time she and Potter broke into the Ministry.

There's heat behind my eyes, sprouting forward into a pinch. A flush on my skin of embarrassment.

There was a time when she stopped asking me about that day. When it seemed like she dropped it. And there was a turning point where she wanted me again.

Where was it?

Something to do with werewolves.

Anything you need.

I need a map. Or a chart of this betrayal. Some kind of graph of her decisions over the past six months to spot the moment she decided to infiltrate my mind and steal things that don't belong to her.

It would spike in certain places, wouldn't it?

Meeting with Lucius behind my back.

Etiquette lessons.

She's still taking those lessons, I know. Still lying to me.

Another spike.

And suddenly I think of everything else locked away in the Ministry cabinets. And my mind floods with everything I wished I could lose when they pulled the wisps from my head.

What had she seen?

I sit at the foot of the bed, my trunks back on. I feel the weight of another person on the bed behind me. Haven't shared a bed with someone like this. Haven't trusted myself to sleep next

to someone for years in fear that secrets would pour out of me in my dreams.

And she worked her way inside, slithering through the cracks.

The bed moves. The sheets slide.

"What are you doing?"

I breathe deep into this acid.

"Did Potter help you?"

But, of course he did. I just need to hear her say it.

"What?"

"Potter helped you get to the memories?"

She pauses too long. She tries confusion.

"It's just like Hogwarts, isn't it? You and Potter running around under an Invisibility Cloak, doing whatever the fuck you want, while the rest of us have to play by the rules."

"Draco. I'm … I'm sorry—"

"Do you know how difficult it was for me to release those memories to the Wizengamot, Granger?" I hiss. "You know how hard I work to keep people out of my mind."

I think of Severus, standing over me as I try to keep my mind from flying into fragments after the Headmaster died.

Did she see that too?

Who I am kidding. She saw everything.

"I wanted to know you. I wanted to understand you." Her voice trembles. "I needed to know why your blood was on my living room walls."

"I told you why. You asked and I told you."

"Never the whole truth. You always leave something out."

I stand. A fire twisting through me. "Who says you're entitled to the whole truth?" I spit at her. She's sitting up in my bed, holding a sheet to her.

"I don't know how to apologize for this," she whispers.

I ignore her attempt at apology. "Which ones."

"What?"

"Which ones did you watch? Or did you grab some popcorn and play them all?"

"No. Just two. The one at my house. And the night the Snatchers brought us to Malfoy Manor."

I can hear her screaming. It echoes up through our chimneys, crawling like smoke from the drawing room below.

"Why?" I hiss at her, and her eyes are wet.

Good.

"I needed to know why you saved us. I needed to understand—"

"*Why* do you keep using that word!" My feet carry me to her, like I'll find answers if I can just breathe the same air as her. "I didn't *save* you, Granger. I did *nothing*. You were screaming on my drawing room floor and I stood there."

"That's not how I saw it."

She saw. She saw me weak for her. Saw me turn to the fireplace and crumble into a pile of bricks as she screamed.

"Oh, I'm so glad we both have seen these memories so now we can debate them."

"You did your best, Draco. You tried to help us then, and you would have helped me if there was an Auction. That's all I wanted to know about."

Did my best. Running around Hogwarts looking for her. Building castles in my mind to hide her in.

I remember this feeling. It hasn't sizzled me in such a long time, too wrapped up in her scent and her body, too grateful to be in her presence.

Like the wind could blow in either direction and I could fuck her or kill her.

"When you told me about the Auction for the first time," she says, "you told me you'd sell me for a profit. But your father told me something completely different."

Of course, he did. If Lucius hadn't gotten involved we could have continued to orbit each other. Bookstores and bar stools. Just shallow enough to keep me satiated.

Maybe Father saw this coming. Maybe he knew we'd end here, with her naked in my bed, explaining why she didn't trust me enough.

I turn to the balcony windows.

"So, I had to know! And I could tell he was right. You would have saved me."

I spin to her. "There's that word again." *Saved*. "You think I would have *saved* you at that Auction, Granger? You think I gathered all available funds, reached out to all relatives and contacts, so that I could set you free? Sent you running with a stolen wand? The room we passed on the way to mine? The first door? That was your room." I feel like dragging her in there. Just grabbing a chunk of her hair and shoving her inside so she can feel what it would have been like. "You were never getting out of here." I smirk at her, laughing at her. "I don't know why I bothered lying about recognizing you that night. You were always going to end up a prisoner in Malfoy Manor."

"So, you're telling me that belonging to you would have been the same as any other Death Eater?" she reasons, and I think of Rowle and Dolohov. "I would have served your dinner and been your entertainment at parties. *Crucio'd* when I disobeyed – at best. Passed around like a whore?"

We could have split her down the middle. In more ways than one!

I look away from her.

"I've had plenty of time to think on this, Draco, so let me know when to stop—"

"Stop."

She presses on. "You would have saved me. It wouldn't have been freedom, but it would have been the best you could have done—"

The best I could have done. Far, far from it.

"Do you think I would have been able to keep away from you?" I sneer at her. "That you would have lived out your days here and remained untouched."

"Yes." So quick and honest. "Don't try to scare me, Draco. I know what kind of person you truly are."

"Ah, yes. You've seen the worst of me, haven't you, Granger." I walk away from the bed. She has no fucking clue what the past five years have been like inside my head. "Just needed to tip a memory into a basin and it's like we've known each other forever."

"I'm sorry, Draco. I'm sorry. I didn't think I had another choice. I wanted to know you. I wanted to understand you—"

Hypocritical bitch. "Then ASK, Hermione. Don't take!" I'm screaming.

Her name is foreign on my tongue. And I feel a sense of brutal satisfaction that we both hear it aloud for the first time as a bastardized endearment.

A tear falls down her left check, and I look down to the carpets to keep from reaching for her.

What happens now.

She apologized. I don't accept.

We're… finished, I guess.

"I'd like for you to leave." She doesn't move, so I clarify, "Get out."

I head to my bathroom suite. I can't watch her get dressed.

I lean my forehead on the door. I can hear her slipping out of the sheets and for a moment I wonder if she's coming for me. If she'll wait me out.

My bedroom door closes.

My chest contracts.

Finished, I guess.

But she probably doesn't know her way out. I should probably—only gentlemanly to walk her out. And kiss her goodbye with a promise for tomorrow—

I'm out the bathroom suite and racing to the hallway, throwing my bedroom door open as a *crack!* bounces through the corridor, shattering the silence and rumpling the portraits.

I stumble to the place she just stood with Mippy, before the little elf vanished her. I stand in my trunks, sucking in air, figuring out what it is I am chasing. What I'm apologizing for. What I'm running through hallways for.

Is it worth it? If she doesn't trust me. If I never allow her to trust me.

It's not enough. Nothing I've done has been. Always just short of the mark.

I turn back to my room, and my eyes land on a door. Unmarked. Innocuous. The faintest hint of a Notice-Me-Not Charm that only I know to look for.

And I could tell he was right. You would have saved me.

Save her. Like an angel. Like Potter.

What was a mattress and a bookshelf compared to freedom. Compared to fighting, instead of running through a castle, hoping to catch a glimpse of brown curls.

My fingers twitch and the door opens, swinging wide.

What were two wingback chairs in front of a fireplace compared to pulling my wand on Bellatrix, cursing her in the back while the blade pulled across her unmarked skin?

What was a renovation, paid in favors and gold, knocking down the wall between suites and opening the first bedroom into a living area with bookshelves upon bookshelves, compared to *That's not Harry Potter. His eyes are too close together.*

What were cream bed curtains, falling down over a canopy bed as large as my own, feather pillows, heavy satin sheets, compared to cursing Greyback, Yaxley, and Dolohov in the back

as they crawled into her home.

A laugh bubbles out of me as I look around the suite. What the fuck was all of this? How would this have made her forget she was a captive, made her forget her friends were likely dead.

Like she hadn't already read every book on these fucking shelves—

Like a sword cutting through their spines, each book is bisected, tops falling off and pages fluttering to the ground.

The wingback chairs explode open. Why would I provide two? What company did I expect her to entertain? What a mockery.

The armoire catches fire, burning the clothes I prepared for her arrival. The curtains around her bed sizzle with blue electricity before catching periwinkle flames and turning her bed into a pyre.

I stand, burning in the destruction.

Like anything would have been enough.

I should have run to Dumbledore. Just before sixth year, when I'd been given the task. I should have committed myself to the Order.

It still wouldn't have been enough.

The flames glint off a reflective surface deep within the room, shining mirrors and brass back at me.

And I hate Severus Snape for doing this to me. For giving me the option to keep her hidden, to keep her safe—

You would have saved me.

I shake my head, glaring at the jewelry box on her bedside table. I had thought it was a fitting home for it.

I stretch my hand for my wand, and it clatters through my bedroom, into the hallway, and slides into my outstretched fingers.

I wave my hand and quiet the room. Smoke and fluttering pages remain.

I point my wand at the jewelry box, summoning it forward to the ground in front of me. It's the only thing in this room that deserves to go.

"*Diffindo!*"

It bounces once.

I snarl, "*Bombarda!*"

It spins on itself, mocking me, top still closed.

"*Incendio! Deletrius!*"

What did Severus do. Almost like it wasn't the first time someone had tried to destroy it.

I send it against the wall. Not a dent in its side.

I freeze it, heat it.

My blood is thundering. This fucking box ruining my life for five years, mocking me. Keeping her locked away like a pretty cream room in a manor. Can't touch her in her box. Won't be able to hurt her in her box.

Keep her in her box and she won't hurt you.

"*Avada Kedavra."*

It explodes in a shower of mirrors and brass and blue velvet. Something slices my cheek, blood mixing with the slide of tears down my face. It smokes. And quiets.

I stare at the hole in the ground, waiting. Waiting for something to feel different. Better.

A scrap of blue velvet flutters from the ceiling, sliding down to fall over my shoulder. I pluck it off my skin and run my fingers over it as I walk a wide circle around the blasted carpet, stepping on glass and brass in my bare feet, my blood mixing into the book pages and blue velvet.

I gather the remains, pulling the glass out of my feet, piling the brass and hinges, holding the fabric in trembling fingers.

And I piece it back together.

~*~

Saturday, May 2, 1998 - later

Second floor girls' bathroom. Second floor girls' bathroom.

I skid around corners. There are spiders as large as four-posters crawling down corridors. Ghosts glistening through walls on horseback.

I take the stairs down two at a time. I can hear voices, hers interspersed like a drum beat.

"But how did you get in there? You need to speak Parseltongue!"

Potter.

"He did! Show him, Ron!"

I peek around the corner and she's standing there, staring at Weasley like he cured Dragon Pox. They're holding bones in their arms.

"I had to have a few goes to get it right," Weasley crows, "but, we got there in the end."

"He was amazing!" She smiles brightly at him. "Amazing!"

I watch as they regroup. I watch her eyes rove over Weasley, drinking him in like she's just realized how thirsty she is.

I remember her on my drawing room floor. She's much recovered. No lasting damage. I wonder if the scar is still there. If she was able to heal the skin in time.

They run off. All three of them, like they're not about to die. And maybe they won't.

I check both directions, and follow.

An explosion to my left blows me off my feet. I land on my side, trying to remember how to breathe and I can hear several new battles beginning around me. I lie there, mentally examining my ribs.

I pull myself up to my feet and watch as the fighters move away.

I'm alone again.

A gurgling to my right.

"Malfoy."

I turn to find Rowle on his back, blood coming up from his lungs, reaching out with wide fingers for his wand inches away.

"Malfoy. Help."

He's got a gash in his side, probably from the explosion. It's an easy fix. A basic skin-knitting charm to get him on his feet again.

"My wand…"

I watch as he stretches, tearing the delicate flesh above his hip.

He coughs, and I see blood bubble out of him.

"Just need my wand."

Cold sweat across my arms. I step towards him, and pull my wand up to aim at his wound. It's a simple twist and twirl motion.

"Thank you," he gasps, and waits for me to cast.

We could have split her down the middle. In more ways than one!

I smile as my wand presses into him, and he howls. I kneel on his chest, digging the wood into his wound, and whisper a slicing charm, watching his eyes bulge as I split him down the middle.

I stand tall, step over him, kick his wand down the stones, and watch him as he gasps and gurgles, making sure I'm the last thing he sees.

I wipe my wand on his robes, and continue following the bounce of curls through the castle.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

> This is the second to last chapter! I am so blessed by all of you for not only reading this story, but DEMANDING that I write it while you read The Right Thing to Do. I am so glad you did. I loved this journey, and I learned a lot about myself as a writer along the way.
>
> A portion of this chapter is dedicated to the ever hilarious Shuns, HeartSandwich, and Lunalunemoon. They'll know it when they see it.
>
> See the end for more notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Monday, March 30, 1998

A girl is screaming. She writhes on the floor just ten paces in front of me.

The fire is warm against my legs.

My mother's hand on my wrist is cold.

My aunt pulls a blade and drops to the person with cinnamon curls and eyes—

The person begs. My aunt laughs.

There is a body on our drawing room floor. It looks at me. And screams.

Someone's hand is on my arm. An echo of a whisper in my ear. *What would Severus say?*

Something cries on a floor of blue velvet, bleeding into the carpets at the bottom of a well.

~*~

Sunday, February 27, 2000

"You can invite her to breakfast, dear."

I stop in the doorway. Mother sips tea.

"She isn't here."

Mother looks up and smiles. "Snuck her out already?"

I turn to the fireplaces, and follow the green flames to the Leaky. Tom waves at me. I walk into Muggle London.

It rains.

~*~

Monday, February 28, 2000

Mother asks me if I've eaten and I lie.

I Floo directly into my office. A note from Dr. Flanders on my desk. I stare at it, waiting for something to happen. I put it to the side.

Carrie brings in my calendar. I cancel the lunch appointments.

"Just for this week?" she asks, scratching through with a quill.

"Forever."

Then I request that she fill my week to the brim. Any busy-work and small meetings I've been putting off, I tell her to schedule it and contact the clients.

Mockridge brings me the financial report at 8:30AM before the Senior Staff Meeting.

"We're in the red."

I nod at the graphs.

"I want to be transparent and let you know that I'll be on the job hunt until we have our feet again. IF we have our feet again. I believe Wentworth will do the same after this is announced."

I look up at him. "I understand. Please keep me as informed as you can."

He nods and leaves.

I look down at the expenditures, and the empty space where investments used to be written.

If Mockridge goes, I'll have his salary to add the pile. That's a bright side.

Senior Staff Meeting at 9AM. I arrive early and shuffle papers in a rhythm I create.

Blaise complains to me about the lack of female staff members under him, begs me to let him have a new intern. Female, preferably.

I look up when she enters. I look back down. She sits next to me, in the spot I gave her when she was my Empress.

I wonder if I can move her.

I begin, and invite her to speak on her progress. Her hands tremble and her lips are dry. She brings her hair back over her shoulder, and I can't see where I sucked at her skin—

The person next to me sits. Their hands fold.

Blaise tries to visit my office after the meeting, and I lock him out.

I have a meeting with my Wizengamot Relations Consultant and my Non-Wizard Relations Consultant after lunch to work through the Werewolf Policy. We propose a week from today.

The only thing I learn is that Cornelia Waterstone has a chin hair on the left side of her jaw.

When I step out of the conference room, Blaise accosts me.

"I have the answer to all of our problems!"

"Wonderful." I lift a brow and step around him.

"I have an investor." He walks backwards, leading me to my office. "Someone we trust. Someone who's looking for a new startup." He shrugs. "I'm actually surprised you didn't reach out sooner."

"Alright," I say, waiting for him to elaborate. I shuffle my notes from the meeting and try to open my door. Blaise stops me.

"Bloody hell, Draco. I thought you'd be more excited." He grins and grabs my shoulders "I've found our savior! We'll be back in the green in no time!"

I roll my eyes at him and say, "It's called 'the black,' Blaise," and push forward into my office.

Marcus Flint grins at me from my chair, his feet up on my three thousand galleon desk.

My skin vibrates.

"Draco," he coos. "I hear you're in a bit of a tight spot."

Blaise slides past me, begins a sales pitch of sorts, outlines how he reached out to Marcus last week, chuckles at a snide comment Marcus makes.

And all the while I stand in my doorway, staring at him with his feet on my desk. Where I used to fuck her.

A voice from the office floor behind me, speaking to Waterstone about some redheaded hag in the Wizengamot. I look over my shoulder to see her exiting the conference room, heading to her office.

If she sees him…

If he even looks at her—

There's a pebble stuck in the grooves of Marcus's shoe. He is in green.

It's raining.

I'm cold.

"So," Blaise wraps up, "I'll let you two iron out any details, talk… investor things." Blaise rubs his palms together, probably planning how he'll be able to hire back the female intern he had his eye on. He sits on the couch, quite pleased with himself.

Marcus smirks at me.

And I wish I'd broken his teeth when I hit him.

"I have quite a nest egg from my new potions career. I've been manufacturing as of late. Maybe you've heard." His eyes sparkle, like we're making fun of someone to their face like we used to. Like the events of that night are a private joke. "I'm looking for a place to invest my new money. And I heard you're in the red." He clucks his tongue.

I haven't moved yet. "Well," I begin, "that was so nice of Blaise to discuss private business financials with you, but we're doing just fine here at Malfoy Consulting." I slide my hands into my pocket to keep my fingers from twitching. "We won't be needing your assistance."

Marcus smiles at me. I hear Blaise sit up on the couch.

"Draco, what are you—"

"It's alright, Blaise," Marcus hums. "Draco's just a little sore at me. I tried to give him a hand a few months back with an affliction he's had. Brewed him up a little cure." He chuckles. "But I guess he didn't like the side effects."

Marcus stands, buttons his robes, and walks around my desk. He picks up a piece of parchment and extends it to me. "Take a look at my proposal before your new Gryffindor morals blind you too far."

I summon the parchment to me instead of walking closer to him. For his safety, really.

The offer is worth this week's inheritance installment that I won't be getting. We would be able to hire back the staff whose hours were cut, and continue with normal business operations.

"Thank you for coming in, Flint," I say, disappearing the parchment. He's still leaning on my desk.

"Come on, Draco!" He laughs. "Let's put the past behind us. Let's get a drink." He nods at Blaise. "The three of us." He smirks at me and steps close, straightening my robes like he used to with my Hogwarts tie. "You've gotta unwind." His tongue peeks out from between his beloved teeth. "Invite Granger. From what the papers say, you two are much closer now that you were before."

There should be a fire. Something mirroring the last time he smiled at me while talking about her. Something like speaking to the hag in the bookstore, or even screaming at a naked girl in

my bed.

You can let it out, sugar. Not everything belongs in boxes.

Marcus brushes my shoulders. "You got to have your way in the end, Draco. That's all that matters, right?"

Focus, Mr. Malfoy. You are too vulnerable like this. Too easy to manipulate.

Despite Severus's best efforts, Queenie Kowalski wins for a brief moment.

"I must not have been clear that last time we spoke, Marcus." My voice is steady, and I don't blink. "You are not to set foot on Malfoy property. You are not to contact myself or Miss Granger in any way. And if I never see those ridiculous teeth again, it will be too soon."

His eye twitches as I remove his hands from my person.

"Blaise, please escort Marcus out through the Floo." I say, keeping my eyes on Marcus's sour expression.

I hear Blaise standing, coming to my side. "Draco," he whispers, "I don't know what I'm missing but this is a little dramatic—"

"Marcus's 'manufacturing business' revolves around a potion used to drug women in bars. I don't think we want any of his Black Market money. As for the 'dramatics,' I would like to spare Miss Granger any discomfort in seeing the man that drugged her leaving my office." I look at Blaise. "So, if you please. Take Marcus away before he goes in pieces."

I move to the window, turning my back on the room and listening to the Floo *whoosh* as Marcus leaves.

"What happened?" Blaise stands next to the fireplace.

"It's in the past now."

"No," Blaise says. "What's happened to you?" I look at him, and he's eyeing me carefully, like I'm some kind of rare creature he's only read about. "What's she done to you now?"

I blink at him, slowly, vision clearing as my lids lift. "She's proved you right. 'Such a stupid thing, to fall for a Mudblood.'" Blaise frowns at me. "'Especially her,'" I echo back to him.

When I turn back to the window, I hear him moving around. I hear him trying to speak to me. I hear him at my side. And eventually he's gone.

The word tastes like a medicine I used to take as a child. Never sweet to go down, but a cure for all internal injuries.

The owl from Dr. Flanders. I stare at it for five minutes before finally tearing the seal.

Incredible progress. Need you for phase two.

I stare out my window. The window I had her pressed against two weeks ago, just before I pressed my tongue to—

I blink.

There is a Muggle man with an umbrella.

An auto broken down.

Someone has lost a hat.

There is a letter in my hand, requesting my presence for a problem I intend to solve.

I head to the Ministry for a portkey.

~*~

Tuesday, February 29, 2000

Monica opens the door. I blink at her, struck by her eyes.

"Hello, Drake. Come in." She smiles warmly at me, and steps to the side. "Tea? Scones? Wendell's making sausages."

The change in her halts my feet before I say, "Er, yes. Thank you."

It's dinner time in the U.K. But I'm not sure I had breakfast today. Yesterday.

Monica takes my coat, babbling about the weather, and stops me before we proceed into the living room.

She looks up at me with Granger's eyes and whispers, "Please, tell me. She's alive, isn't she? Hermione?"

Her hand squeezes my arm, and she has no idea that the skin underneath her tight fingers is tender with a faded tattoo.

I frown at her. "Yes, she's alive. Why?"

The lines around her eyes disappear, like a good night's sleep has just set in. She breathes deeply. "Thank you. Thank you, thank you." She brings my knuckles to her lips. "Dr. Flanders won't let us skip ahead. Won't let us ask questions past our current memories. And I didn't know"—she swallows—"I remember sending my eleven-year-old off to a magic school. I remember reading the books she left behind and finding dark magic and wars. And I just…" She kisses my hand again. "Thank you."

Thank you.

Like *I'm* the one responsible for her. Like I *saved* her.

I pull my hand from her, nodding, and move to the kitchen to say hello to Wendell.

After breakfast, Dr. Flanders shows me his journal. They've kept their memories for two days, waking up every morning just as they were the previous evening.

"They're anxious to learn more. To see her as a teenager," he explains. "They are likely to regress at some point, but their current progress is wonderful. To be expected really; if their daughter is the brightest witch of our age, then they must be exceptionally adept as well."

I flip through his notes, waiting for him to tell me why I'm here.

"So, the next phase would require a Pensieve. And a slow process of letting them absorb someone's memories of Miss Granger while she was away at school."

I nod, running my fingers over a passage about Monica remembering her own real name. Jean.

And then like a snap, I realize that he wants *my* memories.

I look at him, eyes bright and twinkling behind his spectacles. I laugh. A bark right into his face.

Tossing his notes onto the table, my fingers come up to my eyes, rubbing at thin skin. "You've got to be fucking joking."

I'm still laughing when I grab my coat and slam the door behind me.

~*~

Tuesday, February 29, 2000 - again

My door office opens, and closes.

I look up, and she's standing there, shifting from one foot to the other.

She wears pink.

"If this isn't work related, I'm going to have to ask you to get out."

My eyes return to the list of investors I compiled months ago, before I thought I could finance this business on my own.

She throws a sealed letter to me, and for a moment I think it's her resignation again. I can't tell which relief is more acute: thinking it's her resignation, or realizing it's not.

A letter addressed to Hermione Granger, from California.

"I wrote to Noelle after you asked me not to," she says. I scowl at her, finding her mother's eyes. "She's just now gotten back to me. I wanted to come clean. And let you decide if I get to open it or not."

She's a cheat. Just like her mother. There's a procedure for things. If a doctor tells you not to skip ahead in your recovery, you don't go behind his back. Like disobeying a direct request. Like writing to a half-wit in California.

I burn the letter, and watch the fire dance across her surprised eyes.

Back to my paperwork, and I feel her step back.

"She misunderstood the situation," I explain. Nothing in that letter would have been factual anyway."

"What situation?"

"That night. With Marcus Flint," I hiss. "After you left with O'Connor, I didn't handle things very well inside."

She nods, like she understands. "And you didn't clear it up for her? Tell her what actually happened?"

"She was not my priority at the moment. Something I made abundantly clear to her afterwards." The way she screamed in the snow… "And I didn't know how much of it you wanted to be public knowledge. She told her father that I was brash, and unstable. Not someone to invest in."

Funny to have his name on the list in front of me, scratched out as she asks this. Funny to have the feeling of Marcus's hands on my collar still burning my skin.

"That could have been easily cleared up, Draco. I would have happily written to Noelle or her father."

"The damage was done. I didn't want you involved any more than you already had been."

I feel her ready to leave. I want to keep her, even if it burns.

"Any other backstabbing secrets you've been holding onto, Granger?" She turns back to me. "It's Tuesday. I'm starting to wonder if a tenth of my inheritance will transfer into my accounts tonight at 9PM."

She lifts a brow. "It probably will."

She flounces out.

A cheat, and a liar. I should know by now not to trust anyone with eyes like that.

I reexamine the finances with the idea of an installment in the bank this evening.

A cheat, and a liar. Keeping us afloat.

Perhaps my Slytherin is rubbing off on her.

~*~

Thursday, March 2, 2000

The inheritance did transfer. Mockridge is befuddled, but I tell him I cannot explain it.

Today is the publicity campaign for the Snidgets. Rita holds me hostage at the front desk until I answer questions about my love life. I smile at her like Draco Malfoy smiles at Rita Skeeter. My voice croons to her like Draco Malfoy's voice croons.

"Always on the market, Rita," I say. "I can't imagine settling down."

I see curls behind my eyes when I blink.

She leaves her office in purple, shaking hands with Rita and jumping right to work. I leave her to it, trailing back to my office.

I sit behind my desk. And wait.

I turn back to the financials. We're solvent. And I ignore the explanation why.

I stare at the obsidian reflection from my desk.

Brick of obsidian. I hadn't thought of that.

Volcanic.

Acidic.

Cooled and strong.

"Oh, dear." A voice from my doorway. Luna Lovegood is standing there, twisting her hair around her fingers. I blink to make sure I'm seeing her right. "Hm." She tilts her head. "You're orange again."

Orange. That sounds about right.

"Like rust. It's not pretty." She plops on the arm of my guest chair.

"Lovegood." I send her a tight grin. "Are you here for the *Quibbler*?"

She nods absently, looking around my office. She stands, fingers running along my walls, eyes drinking in my shelving and my furniture. She stops in the middle of the room, staring at my ceiling.

"It's like the inside of you." She tilts her head down to look at me. "Sterile. Cold."

My eyes flit across my office, seeing it for the first time.

"Hermione's wearing purple today," she hums. "But she's more of a grey. Slate." She turns her open gaze on me again. "She matches your eyes."

"Yes," I say. "None of us are really our best selves today, Lovegood."

"Can you see them yet? The colors?" She smiles at me.

Her fingers tug at a loose thread on her jumper. She sways, like she can hear a dance in her head.

"No." I look down at my desk. "I don't think they like me very much."

She hums. "I tried to write to you. You never responded."

I swallow. "I didn't respond to anyone. I'm sorry."

"Hm. That's alright." She stares at me, and tilts her head. "I don't like this color on you."

I give her a small grin. "I'll change into something else."

Carrie interrupts us. They're ready.

When I leave my office, Viktor Krum is here, pressing his lips to her skin. And Rolf Scamander is here, smiling at her.

Where's the Weasel. Such a pretty picture they all would make.

I shake Krum's hand. And the grin he gives me is challenging.

You are welcome to her, Vik.

We move into the conference room, and I wait for further instruction. Pansy hovers at my elbow, talking my ear off about Italy. I welcome the white noise.

Potter eyes me from across the room and I purposefully remain invested in other conversations.

I pose for pictures. Pansy tries to make Granger and me pose together, and I have to touch her, place my hand on her side.

I'm doing something wrong because no one is happy.

Lovegood shakes her head at us, like the combination of our hues is hurting her eyes.

I return to my office. As long as I keep my hands busy, I can't feel the heat from my fingertips.

After a few minutes my door opens without a knock. I'm expecting Pansy or Blaise.

Ginny Weasley strides in, pushing the door closed.

She marches to my desk, plants her hands on her hips and says, "It was my idea."

I stare up at her. And she charges on.

"I was the one who pushed her to do it. Blame me. Hermione thought it was a bad idea - she didn't want to snoop like that - but I practically forced her into it." She takes a breath. "Alright?"

"Alright."

"Brilliant. So, you forgive her?"

"Not likely."

She frowns at me. And then tosses herself into a chair. "Merlin, you're a pest," she mutters. "It's the past Malfoy. You two have a future to look forward to. Why dwell on those memories?"

"Because they still affect my present," I reply. "I want you to think of the most unpleasant memories you have, Weasley. The things you keep locked away. And now imagine Potter prying into them without your permission."

She frowns at me. "Harry was there. For every one of them."

I scowl at her, and shuffle papers around. "How nice."

"He was there because he cared for me. He was there *for* me, mostly." She sits forward. "He came for me. He protected me. He braved a Basilisk for me." She tilts her head. "And you've done the same for her," she says, standing and crossing to the door. "You just need a new point of view, Draco Malfoy."

She gives me a small grin, and disappears.

A new point of view.

I get three minutes of quiet before Blaise marches in, closing the door behind him.

"I think Daphne and I might be back together."

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Blaise."

"Well, I don't know. We're going to dinner tomorrow night."

I lift my brow at him.

"What?" He pouts. "We can talk for *hours* about *your* drama but the second I have news, suddenly you don't want to hear about it?"

I frown. "Fine. Yes. Go ahead." I gesture for him to continue.

"We're going to dinner tomorrow night."

"Brilliant."

"Yes."

"Is that all?"

"Think so."

"Great."

We sit. He sighs. "Alright. Fine. What's your drama?"

"I don't have drama at the moment," I say, shuffling papers. "I am now drama-free."

"And how is that?"

I shake my head at my desk. "Miserable, really."

"Well," Blaise begins, crossing his leg, "all I can say, is that it's for the best. This will fade, and you'll grow apart from each other—"

"What the fuck are you going on about?" I snap. "You're getting back together with yours."

"Right," he says. "Do as I say, not as I do." I roll my eyes and he scratches his jaw. "Draco, you need an opportunity to evolve and grow without Granger. You've been so caught up in her your entire life. It's time to be your own person, without her."

An airy New York accent floats to me.

You're so wrapped up in her. You won't have much left…

I swallow, and look to my nails. "What if the person I am, is someone who belongs to her?"

He's silent for a moment, and I can't meet his eyes. And then—

"Go jump off a bridge, I guess."

I drop my head onto my desk. "Blaise—"

"Or. I probably could compile a list of people who would *pay* to Avada you."

"Blaise—"

"Make some Galleons off it."

"Merlin—"

"Someone's gotta keep the business afloat after you're in the ground."

My fireplace hums. The flames crackle to life. And the fire morphs into a face I do not recognize.

"*Draco Lucius Malfoy. An urgent message from Azkaban prison."*

I stare at the mouth, flames flickering green.

"Proceed." My voice is gone.

"*After an earlier incident, prisoner number LM537 – Lucius Abraxas Malfoy – has been taken to St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries for treatment of a stab wound to his left side. Any further questions should be directed a medical professional or an officer on-site. Thank you. Have a pleasant day."*

The fire dies.

Someone is talking to me.

A chair squeaks.

And then I'm standing, taking Floo powder from Blaise, and tossing it into the flames. I watch them turn green again.

Green like death.

And then Blaise says, "St. Mungo's." And I'm shoved through.

~*~

Sunday, June 5, 1994

The scotch burns.

I hate it.

But apparently, it's extremely expensive.

So, it's delicious.

"Delightful," I cough.

Father grins at me. "Leave the bottle," he tells the server in Italian. The short man's eyes widen, and he quickly bows and leaves us. "Are you ready for your exams?" He eyes me over the top of his glass.

"Yes. Despite Remus Lupin's lack of instruction. He's barely there."

I take another sip, forgetting my lesson the first time, and cough again.

"Do you like Defense Against the Dark Arts?"

"I suppose." I pat my lips with my napkin. "I like learning the spells and counter-curses. But I haven't had a suitable instructor yet."

Father hums, tapping his thumb on the table. "I'll speak to the governors about that," he says to himself. "And Potions? Severus is very pleased with you."

"I like Potions. I like the way things come together."

"If you had to take your O.W.L.s tomorrow, which subjects do you think you would score highest in?" He sips from his tumbler again.

This is a test. An O.W.L. in its own right.

I lick my lips and say, "Potions. Charms. Transfiguration. History of Magic. Ancient Runes. Arithmancy. Possibly Herbology—"

"And what would you like to do with all of that?"

I stare at him. "Do?"

He sips, his eyes on me.

"Where do you want to go? What's your plan, Draco?"

I blink at him, and recover. "I might want to become a potioneer. With Severus's help, I could probably get into the Brazilian program. Or perhaps I could work my way up through the Wizengamot. Chief Warlock in no time."

I send him his own cocky grin.

He nods, watching me. "But what is it *you* want to do?"

I swallow.

He sips.

"Sir?"

He sighs with satisfaction at the taste of his scotch.

"Don't worry about what I want to hear. What do *you* want to do?" He lifts a brow at me. "What makes you happy, Draco?"

The only thing that comes to mind is Quidditch. And Potter falling off a cliff.

He continues, "You're exceptionally talented. With your name and your mind, you could easily become Minister of Magic."

His eyes drift to the doorway as a couple enters. My skin tingles.

"But," he says, "if you would like to play Quidditch, or teach"—his eyes find me again, and I wait for the hammer to fall—"that is perfectly acceptable as well."

I watch as he thanks the waiter for checking on us. As he swirls his glass, speaking in Italian. As he points at me, saying something that brings the waiter's attention to me with an "Ah!"

When the waiter leaves, I stare into my full scotch glass, and say, "You mean it? You wouldn't be terribly disappointed if I played Quidditch?" My lips twitch and I say, "Or if I take over for Rubeus Hagrid as Magical Creatures professor?"

He lifts a brow at me with a dry expression. "While I would hope that you would teach something that actually requires intellect… no. You could never disappoint me, Draco."

The scotch burns my chest, warming my bones, spreading heat across my skin.

"I want you to be happy, Draco." He's looking at me, examining me. I see my eyes staring back at me. "Find what makes you happy. And I'll get it for you."

Several waiters bring over a slice of tiramisu with a candle, singing Happy Birthday.

My father grins.

And I wish for us to stay like this forever.

~*~

Thursday, March 2, 2000 – later

The mediwitch recognizes me. I don't need to explain why I'm here.

She escorts me down several corridors until I find my mother at the end of one.

She paces the width of the hall with slow footfalls, her robes long and black.

Already in widow's wear.

She sees me as I approach and pulls me close to her, whispering sweet things and stroking my hair.

I stare over her shoulder to where a D.M.L.E. guard is standing next to a door. He looks at me, and looks away.

"What's happening?" I ask.

Mother pulls back to look at me. And probably repeats what she's just said to me.

Imperius'd.

Knife to the lower left side.

Tissue damage.

Poison.

Something clicks in my mind and I turn my eyes on her. "Imperius curse?"

She lifts a brow at me. "Yes. That's the official report."

I sneer at the door behind her. I roll my eyes and begin to pace with her.

The tiles beneath my shoes blur together in my path.

There are vaults. Deeds. Properties.

Unless he's already taken care of that. Unless he's so unhinged at this point that he would stage his own murder after ensuring that nothing would be passed to me.

I never secured the Manor. Or the estate in France. Just the inheritance. Just the cash.

It's possible he's tied those up with his great uncle's family in Normandy.

I look at Mother, standing still while I swim. Is this to hurt her? To evict her from the Manor if she continues with this divorce?

If he's altered his will, or worked with his solicitors to bargain the inheritance in place of the deeds, then we'll be out.

I try to think. Try to figure out how this works in his favor. His own death, worth all this.

Or is it a warning? He'll survive this and then show us the paperwork.

Draco asked for his galleons before his wedding, so I took it upon myself to alter the inheritance paperwork. I hope you understand, darling.

A door opens, and my eyes snap up.

Not his door.

Three doors away.

There's a window at the end of the other corridor, and for a moment I see my father, standing next to my mother, pacing.

I blink to clear my eyes, recognizing myself in the reflection next to my mother.

I focus down on the tiles. They would make a clean wall. Sterile. Built up from the ground like a sloping mountain.

Heels clicking on my tiles. Climbing up alongside the slope, scaling my mountain.

She's at the other end of the corridor, walking towards us, eyes on me.

Fucking hell.

No peace.

Mother hugs her, answers her questions.

"An Azkaban guard did this? That's preposterous."

I laugh, shaking my head at her naiveté.

Mother sits with her. Talks to her. Dotes on her.

And then Mother glares at me. Finally figuring out why I haven't been eating, haven't been sleeping. Haven't been living.

But not our breakup nor her husband's precarious health can deter her from meddling.

She leaves us alone. And the silence is dark, twisting inside of me at something that reaches for the light.

"What are you doing here?"

There. It's broken.

"I wanted to be here for you and your mother."

"You should be preparing for the trial next week," I hiss.

"I'm prepared."

Of course, she is. "Someone needs to be in charge of the office—"

"Blaise has it handled."

Always an answer for everything.

"I understand if you don't want me here. And I'll go if it will make things easier." She's looking at me. I can feel it. "But I wanted to make sure Narcissa was alright."

I want to snap at her. Tell her it's family only.

I hold my tongue, waiting for Mother to come back and mind her.

"It was a knife?" she asks.

I nod, looking at my tiles again.

"And an Azkaban guard was under the Imperius curse?"

"That's what they say."

"Have you seen him yet?"

"Not until he's stable," I say, kicking at the floor.

Mother returns, forcing a pumpkin pasty into my hand. I push it into my pocket until I can dispose of it.

It feels like hours pass as I listen to the two of them chat.

She's the closest thing I feel I have to a mother.

Jean Granger swims in front of my eyes, waiting for me. Waiting for my mind to open to her so she can find her way back—

There is a door in front of me.

A man stands next to it.

Two women chatter to my right.

I smell cleaning potions.

My neck aches.

I am hungry.

The door in front of me opens. The Healer steps out.

I move closer to him. My mother stands.

He's repaired my father's organs. He's worried about a knife. He's working with curse-breakers.

"What does that mean?" my throat asks.

He looks at me. He has grey hair and brown eyes and thin old skin.

"We expect him to make a full recovery."

He speaks to my mother again about paperwork and all I hear is "Mrs. Malfoy."

"Black." I correct him. He should know in advance. The paperwork will say Black. It's only appropriate to let them know. Legal documents need legal signatures.

He takes my mother away to sign paperwork. And there's a door at the end of the corridor. Closed.

A guard stands next to it. Keeping me out. Keeping him in.

My chest is cold. Breath is icy.

A full recovery.

Fully recovered. No need for deeds and wills. A perfect little plan to get us all here.

I think of a 500-year-old bottle of scotch and Italian voices singing to me. We always said we go back. *Maybe for your seventeenth*, he'd said.

But he wasn't there.

Maybe for Christmas next year.

But he was gone again.

I hated that scotch.

But he promised we would.

Maybe when he's out. Maybe the day they release him I'll Apparate us both to—

My breath stabs my throat.

The guard blurs, like water on a glass. And the tiles are wet and I can't breathe. There's a voice calling me back—

My robes are tight.

My shoes are black.

I have ten fingers.

My fingers over my eyes, pushing the water back inside.

Would he be happy I cried over him? Or just disappointed in my weakness.

You could never disappoint me, Draco.

No.

I look up.

It's a game. This whole thing. Italy and Azkaban and Mungo's.

Just chest pieces moving, clattering about a board and falling over.

A hand wraps around mine. And I don't know whose queen she is. Which side of the board she belongs to, his or mine.

She'll topple us all if we're not careful.

I grab for her, bringing her skin to mine and it hurts to touch her again. It slices into my stomach, and I pull her into me, clutching at her.

A gasping wet sound from my ribs, like there's something pouring out of me, my insides on the tiles.

Clattering and falling out of my throat, bricks tumbling down my tongue and to the floor.

Her fingers in my hair. Her chest against my side. Her voice in my ears and her scent against me.

And it could have been this simple. For years, it could have been only us. But the man behind the door kept me from her, kept me from what I wanted, kept me from being happy.

Lying, like he always does. Never about what I want. Never for my happiness.

I could have been free of him. A knife could have sliced him into ribbons until he was just a memory of scotch and newspapers and his eyes staring back at me in the mirror.

Why won't he just die.

It would be so much simpler.

She's dragging me somewhere. Sweeping me away into a corner for just the two of us. Dark and private and it feel like home with her here.

My knees give out, but I know she's got me.

My arms around her body, the hips that belong to me, my face pressed into the stomach that I've kissed.

"I wanted him to die," I confess into the darkness. Into her.

"I know."

Her hands in my hair and on my neck, absolving me. Forgiving my thoughts.

I cry into her stomach, breathing her into me. I'll hold her until she pries me away.

Her fingers drift through my hair, dancing over my neck and shoulders calming my thoughts and my breath. She holds me, keeps me close and secure.

And I feel like I've fallen down a pit, but she's at the top, waiting for me.

Ginny Weasley's self-righteous tones sing to me: *He was there because he cared for me.*

She came for me. Protecting me.

Save me, please, Granger.

The curve of her hips to her small waist, so familiar under my palms. The rhythm of her breathing against my forehead. My lips press into her stomach, my hands sliding along her back.

She's here for me.

I come to my feet, pressing kisses along the center of her chest, inching toward her skin. She gasps, and I wrap my arms tighter around her, keeping her. My mouth finds the familiar path to her neck, her ear.

Everything falls away.

Nothing has felt like this, like having her close and having her want me.

"I miss you," I whisper into her, pushing against her, pinning her to the door and pressing myself to her.

She says my name in that breathy tone I've come to recognize from my dreams, and my hands slide to cover every inch of her.

Her stomach, her ribs, running up her neck to hold her face. I push into her mouth and she accepts me, taking me in and kissing me in the darkness.

Have to be inside of her again.

It's so simple when it's just the two of us and I'm inside of her.

Her hands move to my shoulders and I'm about to slide my knee between her thighs. She pushes me back.

"Draco. Not now."

I connect to her eyes. She doesn't want me. She doesn't want this—

She brings my face down to her, pressing her lips against mine sweetly. I kiss her back and she pulls away.

"You have to go back out there," she says.

And it all comes back down on me.

Father.

She drags her fingers over my cheeks, into my temples, pulling away all my dark thoughts. She brings me out of the dark room and into the light.

The guard's eyes flicker away from us.

My skin feels tight and swollen.

"I need to… I can't see him yet." I press my hand to my eyes, scraping away the emotion. "I'll check on mother with the paperwork, find a washroom."

So much to do. I'll need to see him. I'll need to speak with him about what it is he wants in return for the Manor. I should probably comfort Mother. I haven't done that yet.

"I'll be here."

I look to her.

Here for me.

Her hand is in mine, comforting me. Saving me.

She smiles at me. And I can't wait to return to her.

I leave, her fingers fluttering through mine, and I find a mirror and then my mother. She is speaking lowly with Skeeter when I find her.

"Draco!" Skeeter jumps. "You poor thing! How did you feel when you found out?"

"No questions to him, Rita." Mother's voice is low and dangerous, bringing Rita Skeeter to heel. "You have a piece on the Golden Snidgets to run on Sunday, so I suggest you quickly write up something about Lucius Malfoy's stabbing so you can concentrate on that feature."

Rita presses her lips together with difficulty, and marches away.

"Do you need me for any of the paperwork?" I ask.

"No," she says, taking my elbow. "I'm finished." She leads us back to the corridor. "When he's awake, I think you should see him. I know you don't want to, but you need to."

I grit my teeth and I feel her hand press on me.

"I know. I have to figure out what he wants. Why he's done this." I feel her eyes on me. "It must be a warning. A chance to show us what we'd have without him. I think he's found a way to keep the Manor from me."

I keep my gaze on the floor as we walk. She's quiet. Until she's not.

"What happened between you and Hermione?" she whispers to me.

"We… we broke up. It's a long, complicated story."

She squeezes me to her. "It doesn't have to be. She's here, isn't she?"

I nod. Feeling lighter. Feeling freer.

We turn the corner, and I take a breath, ready to see her sitting in those chairs, waiting for me. I'll sit with her and hold her hand. And I'll ask her to dinner. And later – much later – we'll talk through trust and secrets.

She's gone.

My feet stop.

She's left. Though she was here for me. She came for me, and now she's—

There's only a guard standing next to a door. And my father behind it.

I'm running, my mother calling after me. The guard draws his wand, eyes wide as I approach, but he's caught in indecision as I throw myself against the door, feeling the wood give under my weight.

She's standing at the end of a bedframe. Mint green curtains.

Here for me. Unless…

Here for him.

No, that's not—

—moan for you after she's screamed for me—

She's not—

There's tears in her eyes. He's hurt her.

"Get away from him."

She springs back, pressing herself against the wall as I step into the room and face my father, propped up in bed.

Pale. Impotent.

"Draco. So good of you to come," he sings to me, smiling.

But still dangerous.

"Stay away from her," I hiss. "Don't talk to her."

He tilts his head. "Draco, she came to find *me*."

I feel something burning up from my gut, and before it reaches my heart, she stops it.

"Don't," she yells out. "Stop using me against him. The game is done."

And I watch my father frown, and looks away. Like a child that has been sent to his room.

I turn to her, and she's glaring at him. Having none of it.

Hermione Granger just turned her best Prefect scowl on Lucius Malfoy and he withered like a first year.

I couldn't love her more.

"Hermione, please leave us alone," I ask.

She glances between us, like she needs to stay. For me.

To save me.

My fingers on her arm. "Please, go. I'll see you in the morning."

She looks at me softly. And I wish I could kiss her goodbye.

Maybe one day.

I turn my eyes on my father, waiting to hear the door click closed.

He stares back at me.

"She's remarkable," he says, a small grin. "But you've known that from the beginning."

"Yes," I reply.

Mother joins us, stepping around the curtain.

"Ah," Father says. "My ex-wife."

"I prefer former-lover," she quips. "It has a better ring to it."

I roll my eyes and go stand in the corner until they're done.

"Speaking of *rings*," he hums, looking down at her bare fingers. "I know the Malfoy engagement diamond has been sent to curse-breakers, but I've asked all the usual jewelers to let me know when your wedding band shows up for pricing."

"Oh, don't bother, dear. I was going to sell it to the Muggles."

I rub my eyes.

"How magnanimous of you, darling. Always thinking of those less fortunate."

"Yes, my thoughts have resided with *you* quite often—"

"Glad to hear it."

"So, Father," I cut in. "You're well? Not poisoned after all?"

He turns his scowling eyes to me, and takes a deep breath. "Yes. Thank you for your concern, Draco. I'm sure they'll catch the person who cursed poor Thompson."

"I'm not sure 'poor' is the word to describe Thompson any longer," I say, and his lips turn up at my cleverness. "So, while you've been granted momentary freedom, what is it you'd like to discuss?"

"Discuss?" he asks innocently. "Why, I just enjoy seeing you both."

"I'm sure." I step closer to his side. "What a blessing then, that you've been mortally injured."

"Your son thinks you intend to keep the Manor from him," Mother cuts to the chase. "That you have some kind of plan for your death that would prevent us from living happily without you."

Father's eyes drift to me. He tilts his head, turning over the idea. "No, no." He shakes his head, squinting, trying to decipher me. "Of course not, Draco. The Manor will be yours once you are married to Miss Granger."

Like punching me in my stomach. I take an even breath. "And when will that be, Father?"

He frowns at me. There's something in his eyes I can't understand. Something I remember from when I was young.

"I presume after you make her an offer of marriage. If you haven't already."

He chuckles. I stare into his grey eyes, remembering her running from the library, tears in her eyes, racing away from me. I whisper, "And if she won't have me?"

He sighs, lifting a brow. "Of course, she will. I've ensured it."

"Ensured it?" My throat is tight.

"I wasn't so sure myself. I thought she might have fancied you, yes." His eyes gleam at me. "But it wasn't until I received confirmation from Madame Michele that she attended her first lesson that I knew she truly cared for you."

My jaw clicks. I feel mother shift next to me. She moves to the window, examining the flowers on the ledge.

I try to follow his logic. Try to figure out what he wants next.

"You've misevaluated her. She's driven by what's right. She attended those classes because you morally obligated her to me—"

"Don't be an idiot, Draco. It doesn't suit you," he says. I snap my jaw closed. "She knew exactly what that little list was when I gave it to her."

"You're both right," Mother says. She stares out the window, hand on her clavicle. "She's not like us. She doesn't know how to play these games. But she's desperately in love with you, and has no idea what to do about it."

Desperately.

I blink at the back of her head. I turn my eyes back to Father and he's smiling at me. I look down.

"What do you want from us, Father. What do I have to do to get you to leave her alone?"

"I just want you to be happy, Draco—"

"*Nothing* has been further from the truth."

He frowns. "I've… taken steps, yes. Steps to make sure she was suitable for you. To make sure she was the right choice. I wanted to be sure she felt the same for you."

I snarl, "That isn't your responsibility—"

"It is my responsibility!" His voice booms throughout the room. I feel it clap in my chest. "As Lord of Malfoy Manor, it is my responsibility," he hisses. He sits in a hospital gurney, but it feels like he's in his armchair in the drawing room, holding court with me. "You think I don't

know you? Haven't watched you over the years?" he growls at me. "I knew you'd disappear with her the moment you could. Knew you'd give everything to that girl without a moment's thought about your duty to this family."

"My duty to marry a pure-blood, you mean?" I lean forward, grabbing the rails at the end of his bed. "My duty to marry a girl who knows how to host parties and curtsey and recognize the Rembrandt we have in our ballroom."

"Yes." His eyes harden into mine. "All of those things are important. Your mother can testify to that."

I see her shift in the corner of my eye, but she doesn't speak to deny it. I think of Pansy.

If you want her in your world, Draco, there are things she needs to learn.

"But most importantly," Father begins, voice calm and even, "I knew if that girl gave you even a scrap of affection, you would follow her like a dog for the rest of your life. You'd be lost forever." He presses his lips together, and I feel my heart in my neck. "So, yes. I meddled." He scratches his jaw and grins. "I told you. I'll get you whatever makes you happy."

I close my eyes, an impending headache creeping through my brain. "In the future, I'd like to do the 'getting,' Father."

"Then what are you still doing here?"

I open my eyes. He's shaking his head at me. A small grin. Mother is looking at me over her shoulder, wearing a similar expression.

"If I'm not mistaken, she'll be at a dance studio in an hour." He lifts a brow at me. "She could use a partner."

I think of her arms around me, holding me. The way she shut down my father with one glance.

How she showed up for me. How she always shows up for me.

I nod at my Father, our best impression of a goodbye, and stumble to the door on my way to find her.

I pass through the door, face-to-face with the guard, before I turn back to wait for Mother.

When she doesn't follow, I look around the curtain, watching her float to sit on the bed at his side, her back to me.

Father's eyes dance across her face, and his hand reaches for hers. She pulls her arm back.

"Don't do this again," she whispers to him, barely loud enough for me to hear. She leans forward, and pushes his hair behind his ear. "Or I'll stab you myself."

He smiles up a her, turning his cheek into her palm.

"I know you will," he says.

I watch for a few moments as they stare into each other. She pulls her hand back, and hovers near him. She tells him about a book she's read, and he watches her face, listening and nodding. He tries to reach for her hand again and she shifts away into the chair at his side, but continues telling him about the book.

He smiles at the right moments, and frowns at the bad.

Like a dog. Looking for scraps.

I let the door close behind me, and disappear down the corridor, heading to a dance studio.

Chapter End Notes

The scene with Marcus Flint was actually cut from TRTTD. But I realized I didn't need Hermione in the scene, and by that point I knew I was writing this POV, so I held onto it for over a year.

ALSO - I know a lot of you want epilogues and babies and weddings, but I need to let you know in advance of the next chapter that this story will not feature them. I realized the exact way I wanted to end All the Wrong Things, and including an epilogue will be tedious. BUT - I will have a separate story featuring many snippets I have already written and posted on Tumblr that include the wedding and their children and Pansy babysitting and other lovely stupid things. Also, a Lucissa 3-shot is coming your way. Also, a little story called The Auctions. Don't know if you've heard of it...

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thursday, March 2, 2000 - later

She runs in from the rain, kicking off her shoes, shucking her scarf, and I'm smiling at her. Late for dance class. Like an eight-year-old who desperately didn't want to go.

When she sees me sitting, she gasps, clutching her pearls, like I'm the killer in a horror story.

"What are you doing here?" she wheezes. "Is everything – Is your father doing alright?"

Thinking of me. Going from zero to ax-murder to genuine concern in .07 seconds.

I stand, and before I can answer, she's onto another emotion.

"I'm taking these classes, Draco." She glares at me. "I only have one more week left, and I intend to finish. The inheritance will transfer and that's that. I made a deal."

Stubborn little wench.

I open the door for her, and sweep my hand to guide her entrance. "After you."

She stares at me for a few moments, and then enters.

A sharp admonishment comes from the direction of the gramophone. "Miss Granger, you are two minutes late."

Merlin, fuck that fucking voice.

"I'm afraid that was my fault, Miss Truesdale," I say, and the withered old bat spins around, face cracking into a delighted smile.

"Young Mr. Malfoy! What a lovely surprise." She pats at her grey hair, and slips her hand into mine as I kiss her knuckles. "You have been so missed."

"I'm glad to hear it," I flirt back.

"How is your mother? I was so sorry to hear about your father's incident," she pouts, and then with a wave of her hand the gramophone tunes up and Granger is sent to the ballet bar.

I answer in the respectful way, eyes catching on the evening *Prophet* laying on her end table. A picture of my family stares up at me.

She must know who's paying her, right? She must know why she's been required to stay past her usual classes for private lessons with a Muggle-born girl.

Truesdale floats over a chair for me to sit in at the front of the room, and slides over her own stool.

"If you are here to check on her progress, Mr. Malfoy, I am sorry to report that she needs *much* more time and focus to truly compare to girls her age."

And there it is.

I smile at the dig. And I wonder if some of my quips and insults as a child were absorbed through watching Truesdale "teach."

I turn my eyes to see Granger in her final demi plié and grand plié, ankles rolling outward, backside slipping out of alignment.

And maybe there's some truth in the insult.

I bite back my grin.

Truesdale sets up the Viennese Waltz on the floor, guiding Granger through the formations and turns. Her cheeks burn bright as she stumbles. Her eyes pretend I don't exist.

"You see, Mr. Malfoy? She is unfocused and uncoordinated."

You cow. Get stuffed.

"Hm. Perhaps she's been working too long without a partner," I say.

Granger's eyes finally meet mine as I move toward her. There's that ax-murder fear again…

"Er, I don't quite know the steps yet—"

"Come on, Granger," I whisper. "Let me take you for a spin."

I take her in my arms, one hand along her back, one sliding against her palm. She's tense, already in fight or flight mode. She looks down at our feet, eyes flitting around at the footsteps she has to follow.

"Look at me," I say. Trust me.

Her eyes land on mine, and we glide.

My feet guide us, my hand pushes and tugs at her ribs, and her eyes stay on me. Her breath catches as I turn us, and her eyes deepen, like tunnels I can dance through.

It feels nothing like Legilimency. And yet it's everything like it. Connecting to her in this way. This trust she gives me. And the feeling of nothing between us. No space, or bricks, or monsters. No misunderstandings or assumptions. No blood or war.

And when the music stops and Truesdale adjusts her spine and her elbows, she stays in my arms, in my eyes, letting me into her very soul, and searching for mine underneath all the

cobwebs and shadows.

The music plays again. And when she's doing better than before, I turn her under my arm. Her feet stumble, but she comes back to me with ease, eyes wide and surprised, and she *laughs*.

And I see a blue dress spinning. And a girl laughing as she stumbles into her partner. Laughing and happy.

Truesdale, of course, has to be a cunt about it.

"The dance floor is no place for laughter, Miss Granger." And then she added under her breath, "Excellent work."

We go through several other dances and styles, testing my memory as much as hers. She trusts me. She watches me. Her eyes stay on mine, not drifting to our feet or to Truesdale.

And then the gramophone plays the French Waltz. She looks at me with wide eyes like we have a joke. Like we've known each other for years and someone has just brought up a simple thing of no consequence to them, and we just smile in our tea at each other.

I bow to her. And she smiles. And when she curtseys, a beautiful dip, steady and low, she keeps her eyes on me, and it's like we were always meant to meet each other this way, in this dance.

She floats into my arms, and it's clear this dance is much more practiced for her. She anticipates my steps instead of letting me push her where she needs to be. She lifts her own arm to spin under. She doesn't squeeze my hand, pressing when she forgets the steps. Instead it just rests against my skin.

We part from each other, and she smiles at me in the reflection of the dance studio mirrors when we greet our new partner. I bring my palm up, watching her, thinking of how she wouldn't touch me. Even after I found a way to orbit her, found a pathway to appear in front of her, closer than I'd had any right to be. I stole her breath, and hoped I could take more from her, and all she had the courage to do was bring her palm within an inch of mine.

Even though she wanted to.

Brave little lion, still waiting for the snake to strike.

She laughs, bringing me out of my thoughts, and as we spin around imaginary partners, we have a moment of facing each other across the room. And she giggles.

It's contagious as Dragon Pox. I smile back at her, loving the sound of it.

"Miss Granger. Keep focused on your new partner."

She laughs outright, and I grin at her.

Truesdale starts in on the metaphoric symbolism of the dance, and I see Granger's eyes dull, in the same way they used to in Trelawney's classroom when she had to hold her tongue.

"The new partner in the French Waltz signifies the end of our youthful escapades," Truesdale sings from across the room, voice carrying over the gramophone. Granger one-two-threes her way back to me, and I lift my hand, palm facing her. "And in returning to your original partner, it signifies that you have forsaken all others, and you have chosen your partner for life."

Something shifts in her eyes. She blinks at me, hearing Truesdale's symbolism.

My hand is lifted, facing her, offering myself to her. Choosing her.

And I wait lifetimes for her.

She lifts her hand, and looks into my eyes as she presses her skin to mine.

We spin, moving around each other, connected. Finally.

We're back at the beginning. Our hands drop. I bow. She curtseys. And I could drop to one knee right now, based solely on the look in her eyes.

"Adequate, Miss Granger."

She blinks, breaking away from me. And the moment is gone.

Truesdale offers her a few classes with twelve-year-olds over the summer, to complement the level she is currently at. I smile at the black floors while Granger turns orange with rage.

We exit to the lobby, and I say, "For what it's worth, I think you're on level with *fourteen-year-olds*. At *least*."

She glares at me, and it's just as exhilarating as her smile.

I watch her change out of her shoes and toss her scarf around her neck. I want to take her home. I want to dance with her in a more familiar way, where she's *vastly* more practiced.

But I have things to do.

"Do you and Monsieur DuBois always meet at that café?"

She looks up at me, surprised. "Er… yes, mainly. Why?"

I ignore the question. "And you and Madame Bernard have tea at that French restaurant?"

She's suspicious now. "Why?"

I grin at her. Her scarf flutters around her shoulders, and I need to touch her again. "Like I said." My fingers twist her scarf into her coat, knuckles brushing her neck. "You've been working too long without a partner."

She stares at me, and I smirk, leaving and heading to the Ministry.

~*~

Friday, March 3, 2000

When the door opens, Monica Wilkins/Jean Granger stands there, smiling softly. Her eyes drift over my face.

"Can I help you?" she says, with an amiable smile.

And my gut slices open.

I'm too late.

She doesn't even recognize me anymore.

There's sand in my throat and I can't even begin to explain who I am to her.

Wendell appears behind her. "Ah! Drake!" He holds her shoulders, rubbing her arms. "Darling, you remember Drake. He stopped by the shop. Taking his honeymoon alone, remember?"

Wendell nods at me over her shoulder, lifting his brows meaningfully. He remembers me, but wants me to go slow with her.

She sticks her hand out. "Sorry, I don't quite remember." She grins. "Monica Wilkins. Lovely to meet you."

I swallow, taking her hand, and find a bandage wrapped around her palm.

"Is Dr. Flanders here?" I ask Wendell. I wonder if he's discovered his real name yet.

"Yes, of course." Wendell ushers me inside, and I ignore the way Monica stands for a second too long at the doorway before closing it.

Dr. Flanders is doing the dishes from breakfast. He smiles at me, like he's been expecting me. While Wendell sets Monica up in the living room with a television show, I turn to Dr. Flanders.

"What's wrong with her?"

"All a part of the process, Mr. Malfoy. There's bound to be relapses."

"Is this my fault?" I ask, watching Monica stare at the remote control.

A hand on my shoulder. "No, no." Dr. Flanders shakes his head. "The mind is a strange network. Even if we had moved forward with the Pensieve, she might have regressed." He adjusts his glasses and says, "I do apologize, Mr. Malfoy. I suppose I shouldn't have assumed you would want strangers prying into your brain."

Ah, why not. It's all the rage.

"What happened to her hand?"

Dr. Flanders looks down. "That's on me, I'm afraid. She was making tea for us and burned herself. I shouldn't have let her use the stove. And I can't heal her with magic until she *remembers* magic, so…"

I watch as Monica giggles at the television box. Wendell smiles at her.

"Wendell remembers?"

"Yes, he's doing quite well. Henry, actually. He's remembered his name."

Henry and Jean Granger.

"What do you need from me?" I ask.

Dr. Flanders says, "Whatever you're willing to give," and gives me a kind smile.

I watch Jean Granger press a hand to her temple, frowning at something.

"All of it," I say. And I echo back her daughter's words. "Anything they need."

~*~

I spend the rest of the day with the Grangers, downing Pepper-Up Potions like candy. Just before dinner, I take my Portkey back to the U.K., head to the coffee shop on the corner, and walk into the office at 8:45AM with Granger's coffee cup.

I place it on her desk, and tell Carrie I'll be out of the office all day.

I pop back into the Granger's backyard as Jean and Henry serve the lamb chops.

"How was your phone call?" Jean asks, taking my coat.

"Excellent, thank you. Everyone in the U.K. says hello." I grin at Dr. Flanders.

While I do the dishes – with magic, of course; Dr. Flanders disapproves and keeps Jean's attention away from the kitchen – Henry turns to Jean.

"Monica, dear. I think Dr. Flanders and Drake have something exciting to show us."

She looks over at me, and I quickly grab the dish hovering over the sink. "Oh, really? What is it?"

Dr. Flanders grins. "It's like a movie. But it's inside of this bowl." He places the Pensieve on the dining room table. "Drake is going to show you how it works."

I stare into the suds. I still don't like this. Henry is ready, but Jean? She stares out the window when asked a direct question. She laughs at silence. And she's having issues with basic motor

functions. She held the remote control upside down for several minutes, pressing "buttons" on the back. She forgot how to hold her fork at dinner. Henry had to cut her pork chops for her.

But Dr. Flanders says her brain is trying to fight the new information. Every time she has some kind of a relapse moment, he smiles, explaining to me that she wants to remember, but the memory charm is fighting her.

I don't like it. She's going to end up in the bathroom again, locked inside with her husband on the other side of the door. She doesn't even remember she had a daughter at this point.

"What a strange invention," Jean says, staring at the Pensieve. I'm drying my hands when she looks up at me and says, "Did you create this, Draco?"

I blink.

Draco, not Drake.

She smiles at me, and I see her daughter's eyes.

"Not quite." My voice is gone. I clear my throat. "But you might see me inside. Er, in the movie."

"Oh, how fun!" She beams.

I move to the cabinet where we stored the vials. Dr. Flanders said we should start slow. Something without action, without conflict. Just her. And preferably no magic.

My fingers shake as I pluck the vial labeled *January 1995* from the shelf. It's not like they'll read my thoughts. They'll just see the physical moment. Dr. Flanders is explaining that things may look real, but they won't be able to affect them. The people in the movie won't be able to see them.

Jean laughs a bit. "How silly. Of course not."

I turn to the Pensieve before I can think too hard on it, and pour the silver wisps into the bowl.

Henry, Jean, and I lean forward, and the Hogwarts library swims into focus.

I stand in the middle of it, staring at myself, seated at a table in the corner, working hard on an essay.

Jean gasps to my left. "Oh lovely!"

Almost as if I heard her, the younger version of me looks up, through us to the other side of the aisle.

I turn. Henry is gazing at the vast library, eyes bright with wonder. Jean is staring at the young me with a smile.

And behind them sits a bushy-haired know-it-all, researching a golden egg. I gesture for them to turn and see her.

Henry presses his lips together, inhaling quickly. Jean just tilts her head at her daughter. I watch her expression. A simple smile.

Hermione sits back in her chair, and picks up a blue Sugar Quill. I blush, looking down at the Hogwarts library stones, reminding myself that they can't read my thoughts.

Henry chuckles. I look up, watching him watch his daughter. He shakes his head and whispers, "…rot her teeth," under his breath. He leans in to me and asks, "How old is she?"

"Fifteen," I say automatically.

I encourage them to move closer. Jean is quick to move, but Henry takes slow steps, walking around the table.

"Sweet thing," Jean murmurs kindly when Hermione tries to write with the wrong quill, jumping and sucking the candy into her mouth while she scribbles with the real one.

And some morbid need twists in me. I turn to watch myself watch her. To watch the first moment I'd thought about her mouth consciously.

And it almost knocks me over. The raw desire on my face. The way I lick my lips quickly, gripping at my own quill.

I watch in horror as the younger me watches her. No Occlumency yet. Nothing to shield myself from her. Just an open fixation.

I wait for this boy to tear his eyes away, to look ashamed of himself, but he just stares at her.

I'd always wondered how Blaise had figured it out. And now it's just disgusting to me how blatant it all was.

I tear my eyes away, as the younger me wets his lips again. I stare down at my feet, feeling frustrated and vile and helpless.

I look up, ready to take them back, and I find Jean Granger watching the boy in the corner lusting after her only daughter. I feel a blush staining my cheeks and neck, and I turn to Henry, eyes still on his daughter, thankfully.

Jean smiles up at me, points to Hermione, and says, "Is this your fiancé?"

My muscles freeze. I stare at her until finally I remember that was my alias. A young man from the U.K. taking his honeymoon alone.

Before I can answer, she leans in and whispers, "You seem to like her."

I know. And so does every-fucking-body else.

I close my eyes, rubbing my jaw.

Jean giggles. And I open my eyes to watch Hermione look up, catch me staring, and quickly look away, wiping her mouth and blushing.

"She likes you, too," Jean says. I roll my eyes, and then she says, "She told me so."

Henry looks at his wife. I wait, heart beating.

Jean's brows knit together and she looks away for a moment. Then back to Hermione.

"Wendell," she says, staring at her daughter with wary eyes. "Who is that?"

Henry steps toward her, taking her arm. "Her name is Hermione."

Jean squints, stepping backwards. "I'd like to go. Can we go home now?"

We leave the memory.

Jean has to go lie down.

And Henry eyes me for the rest of the night.

~*~

Sunday, March 5, 2000

I spend the weekend dropping in on Granger's classes, flirting with Monsieur DuBois and winking at Madame Bernard. I say goodbye to her after every appointment, and head back to Australia.

Jean has a break-through on Saturday, while Henry regresses.

It's incredibly frustrating, watching them take one step forward, and two steps back.

By Sunday evening, they are at the same pace. They know their real names. They know they have a daughter named Hermione. Henry doesn't know more than that, but Jean remembers her at six, learning to ride a bike.

"She skinned her knee and cried for hours. You honestly don't remember, Henry?"

Henry is easily frustrated in these moments. And Dr. Flanders has to dose them with Calming Draught before every session.

It's time for them to see her in different stages of life, and in emotionally different places.

I take the vial from the cabinet that I've lovingly labeled "The Slap" and pour it into the Pensieve.

I watch her march towards me as I smirk at her. She slaps it off of me.

I laugh at myself, while Jean sucks in a breath, ready to chastise her daughter. I'm still laughing when we pull out of the memory.

I show them the Yule Ball, and I'm careful not to draw attention to my former self, letting them watch her dance and laugh with Krum. Jean leans into me while I watch myself pout in the corner with Pansy on my arm.

"Who is this beefy boy?" she says, vaguely waving at Krum. "You didn't escort her to this?"

I smile and swallow. "No, I was…" I look over at myself, glaring at her in disgust wondering if the Mudblood had slipped something into our pumpkin juice at the breakfast table. "I was an idiot." I chuckle.

Jean loops her arm through mine. "Good things come to those who wait."

~*~

Monday, March 6, 2000

They don't recognize me in the morning.

Dr. Flanders calms them, and escorts me to the front door, telling me things are normal. And he'll contact me in a few days.

But all I can hear on my way to a quiet corner where I can take my Portkey, is the sound of Jean's trembling voice asking who I was and what I wanted.

But they did ask where their daughter was.

I make it back to the Manor, seeing my bed for the first time in two days.

I'm seconds away from taking a Dreamless Sleep potion when Mippy pops into my bedroom.

"Master Draco! Mistress is worried! You is not home all weekend!"

I roll my eyes, sigh, and place the potion back down on my dresser. I follow the little elf down to the drawing room where Mother is reading a book. She doesn't lift her eyes from the page.

"Oh. You're alive. Splendid."

"Mother." I nod at her.

"For three days now I've donated your dinner scraps to the poor. Like some kind of soup kitchen."

"You, personally, handed out food?" I lift a brow at her.

She lifts one back. "Your father was released back to Azkaban this morning."

"Alright."

"Did you find Hermione on Thursday evening?"

I nod.

"Did you make up?"

I nod.

She frowns at me. "Well?"

"'Well,' what?" I shrug. "We made up. We have a very important week ahead of us." I stare at the carpets, kicking my shoes against it. "I… I'm working on a project for her." I look up at Mother and she's waiting for me to continue. "I've been to Australia. I'm working with a doctor to counter-act the memory charm on her parents."

Her lashes flutter, and she takes a slow breath. "And is it working? You're sure the doctor knows what he's doing?"

I think of Jean clutching her robe tightly around herself, looking at me like an intruder. I swallow. "Yes." I look away. "They're lovely people. I can't wait for you to meet them soon."

She hums. "Well, if that's the ace up your sleeve, I hardly need to give you this."

She pulls from her robes a small golden box, opens it, and places it on the end table.

The Malfoy engagement ring sparkles back at me.

"Curse-free," she says.

I stare at it, and shake my head free of the image of it on her finger.

"That's not… I don't need that. Not yet." I press my lips together. "You remember what she said. It's not something she wants."

Mother tilts her head at me. She closes the ring box, stands and walks past me. "I think you'd be surprised at the answer if you just asked her."

She presses the box into my hands, and leaves me alone in the drawing room.

~*~

Monday, March 6, 2000

The lift doors open, and she smiles when her eyes land on me.

"Good morning, Mr. Malfoy," she hums, taking the cup of coffee from my warm fingers and letting me walk her to her office.

"Is there anything I can do for you before we head to the Ministry?"

"No," she breathes. "I just need to gather my things."

"I'll handle Skeeter today. Don't give her a second thought."

She nods at me. "Twenty minutes?"

She disappears into her office, her arm brushing mine.

She's considerably more anxious when I come to collect her. Blaise is visiting her, and I give him a curious look when she doesn't make eye contact with either of us as she heads for the lifts.

Waterstone, Granger, and I make our way to the Apparition point, into the main entrance of the Ministry, and down to the courtrooms. It is now clear to me that Waterstone is not equipped to understand social cues. She yammers on and on about Wizengamot member and their families, where they've stood on previous issues, who prefers direct eye contact.

And all of it is overwhelming Granger.

We have about ten minutes, and she looks like she's focusing on focusing.

"Cornelia," I interrupt, and Waterstone stops. "You know what would be most helpful right now?" I turn my Malfoy smile on her. "I think it would put everyone at ease to know when they'll be beginning."

Waterstone looks at me like she's just had a wonderful thought. "I'll head up, and see if I can't watch the Wizengamot as they arrive, shall I?"

There it is. "Thank you. What a splendid idea."

Waterstone leaves us alone, taking the lift upstairs. I stand across from Granger, leaning on the wall, hands in my pockets. She chews on her lip, eyes staring wide at the stones in front of her.

"Anxious?"

She laughs lightly.

I guess so.

I watch her mind work. She'll do brilliantly. She's always done brilliantly.

I let her think. I stare at her shoes, fondly remembering her ugly little Ministry shoes she wore to my trial, and every day after. Pansy has her in better shoes, obviously—

"I want to be with you."

The words jar me. I can scarcely believe they came from her.

"I want to date you. In public. Not just lunch in your office."

I swallow my heartbeat, listening to her words, trying to make sense of them.

"I want to come out as a couple to M.C.G., and figure out what to do about the Love Contract and dating policies…"

Her voice dances across the dank stones, quiet and sure. I'm afraid if I lift my eyes to her the spell will break and she'll stop.

"I want to go to dinner with you, and be photographed in the *Prophet*. And hold hands on the way to the Apparition point."

Like we want the same things. Like there's nothing between us any longer and why aren't we just *doing* those things—

"I want to spend the night again – every night."

Yes. Tie you to bed.

"I want to have weekly meals with your mother—"

She'd love that.

"—and let Mippy make me pumpkin soup—"

That fucking soup. We'll have it every night if you want.

"—and spend *hours* in that library—"

Her voice trembles. And I really should have known it's the library she'd get emotional about. Should have shown it to her years ago. Given her the keys.

"I want to be your wife."

My throat closes. My eyes are dry. I can't move.

"And see you in the mornings, and marry you in the gazebo and – and rule the fucking *world* with you."

There's a song playing somewhere, thrumming in time to her voice. Something low and lovely. Pale pinks and periwinkle blues and velvet navy and golden silk dance in a carousel.

Lovegood was right. There are colors. *Everywhere*.

"And I don't know where the wires got crossed along the way, I don't know how things got so twisted. But that's all I've ever wanted."

Where is the fucking ring. Why don't I have it on me. At all times.

Her voice trembles as she continues to wreck me. "When you ask me why I've done the things I have, I want to be able to say it's because I love you." I feel my pulse in my ribs, beating to get out. "That everything has been for you. It's never been about the 'right thing to do.'" She laughs at herself. "It's because I love you."

I'd never imagined her saying it. Never knew what it would sound like from her lips, with that voice that tortured me in my dreams, singing to me in the mornings as I gripped myself, screaming and crying in my nightmares.

It's an exquisite sound. Like the first time you hear a song that you'll come to play on repeat.

"And I want to know you." She's still talking and I just don't know why we're not holding each other yet. "I want to know everything about you. And I understand that I have to ask, but I want to be able to ask. I want you to tell me things when I ask." She's getting off topic now. "But if there's something you can't tell me, not right now, then maybe there's a – a hand signal or something. Like you pull your ear—"

I jump when I realize it's me that she's waiting for. It's me that has to stop this nonsensical monologue.

I move for her, scared to look at her face and see that I dreamed it all.

But she has tears running down her cheeks, looking like she just fought for her life. I step into her, and she breathes deep, waiting.

"Ask," I beg. "Ask me now."

She looks deep into my eyes and says, "Why didn't you identify me that night. At Malfoy Manor."

My body flows into hers, my hands braced softly on the wall on either side of her. She tilts her head back, ready to drink me in.

I smirk at her. "It was the right thing to do."

She blinks at me. A slow smile pulling at her face. Her tears tumble down and she laughs, crying. She tilts her face toward the ceiling and whispers, "God, I hate you."

I smile. "I love you, too, Granger."

It was supposed to feel difficult, wasn't it? Not as simple as breathing.

I kiss her, and she holds me close. I slide against her spine, pulling her in. Her lips press wet kisses against mine, and she pulls back.

"I'm sorry. That was probably a lot. The… marriage thing and staying every night—"

Oh no you don't, Granger.

"Oh, I don't know. I think the gazebo is available this weekend."

She laughs. Like I'm kidding. And I grin at her.

The chime of the lifts arriving. I kiss her before pulling my arms away.

Waterstone marches down the corridor, announcing that they are ready for us.

Granger shoves the tears off her cheeks, wipes at her mascara, and strides to the oak doors. She looks back at me before disappearing, smiling and flushed.

Radiant.

The door closes, and I wait.

Wait for her.

What's another few hours after all this time?

~*~

We go to lunch and she talks my ear off. She tries to pay. The minx.

On Tuesday I follow her to tea with Madame Michele. The small woman smiles at me from the corner of her eye.

They all smile at me now. The girls in the office. Kelsey, who's always known. They all smirk into their magazines when I walk Granger to her office or when I escort her to the lifts for trial.

And I smirk back.

On Wednesday, we finish dinner at a lovely Italian place and she turns to me with soft eyes and says, "Would you like to come over to mine for a drink?"

Her place. Her bed with her sheets that smell like her.

I sigh. "As much as I want to, I can't. There's something I need to get back to at the office tonight." The lie comes easily.

"Is it anything you need help with?"

I stare at her, clenching my jaw to keep from telling her. "Not yet. But possibly soon."

She nods, and I lean into her, pressing a soft kiss to her lips. Her fingers trace my jaw, and I pull away before I stay with her all night.

Once she's disappeared, I Apparate to Heathrow.

~*~

Friday, March 10, 2000

Dr. Flanders and the Grangers stay in a hotel suite near the office. When I'm not walking Granger to her office or escorting her down the lifts to the Wizengamot, I'm with the Grangers.

They've maintained their memories for four days. They survived the stresses of Muggle travel (which Dr. Flanders assures me is not all that stressful, but I'm still unconvinced). They decided to close Sweet Tooth and put it on the market, officially moving back to the U.K.

I'll let the Granger family decide if they want their old house, but in the meantime, I send a crew to the Muggle neighborhood to clean my blood off the walls and erase any magical signatures haunting the house.

The Wizengamot votes for the Werewolf Policy. Of course, they do.

Father writes to me the night before to let me know that he has it on good authority that the majority of the council is voting in her favor. And the minority are weak-minded fools who only need a letter from the right person—

I roll my eyes and toss the letter into the fire.

When Granger and I head back to the office on Friday afternoon, I take her hand when we step into the lifts.

"I have a surprise for you." Merlin I hope this works.

"A good surprise?"

I nod. "I was shocked to hear it was ready today." Dr. Flanders and I were supposed to do this on Sunday, but he said it was time. "So, I wanted you to have it now, in honor of your triumph in the Wizengamot today."

"I – thank you," she stutters. "I'm… quite speechless really. It's something you had made?"

"No." Just wait, you silly witch. "Fixed, really."

She won't give it up though. So I tell her to just take the afternoon off, which she also doesn't like.

I march away from her, demanding that she go to her office and not come back.

I take a deep breath once I'm in the staff meeting. We begin as soon as I settle in. Mockridge starts in on our second quarter projections, quite pleased with himself that we have all ten installments of the inheritance to work with.

I'm just thinking of the Muggle-born Integration Program and how to throw money at it when the door to the conference room slams open.

Oh, fucking hell.

She marches to me, ignoring every other person in the room.

Something's gone wrong. Where is Dr. Flanders?

She reaches for me – to throttle me – and then her lips are on mine, leaning into me, hovering over my body. My hands steady her, holding her head and twirling her hair as she smiles into me.

She pulls away with a smirk, and tries to address the room with as much dignity as she can muster.

"Draco Malfoy and I are dating. We, uh… Yes. We're dating. Boyfriend and girlfriend," she stumbles. My face heats. "So, we'll need to take a look at that… er, Love Contract business. And just… abolish that, I say."

Blaise cheers. A few of the ladies giggle.

"Because… because I love him," she says, and I feel her eyes on me, inviting me. "And he loves me – I think—"

"I do, yes." There's some odd sensation of joy trying to overcome my face.

"So. That's that! I'll, uh, let you all get back to it."

She bids us goodbye, and they applaud her exit. All but Mockridge, who really for the life of him can't figure out what just happened.

At the end of the meeting, I run to my office, still blushing and smiling.

Blaise follows me in and jumps on my back, hollering.

"Merlin, Blaise!"

"You did it! You hooked yourself a Golden Girl, mate!"

"Get off!"

"Oh, she *fiery!* You'll have your hands full for sure—"

I knock him off of me and he shoves me onto the couch, one knee pressing into my chest. I'm about to twist his nipple to get him off when I see him snarling down at me.

My eyes go wide.

"If you fucking dare," he hisses, "choose Harry Potter as your best man over me…" He growls and I look up at him, quite terrified. "I will kill you the Zabini way. And then I'll marry your sexy little widow, and fuck her everywhere in Malfoy Manor—"

"What the fuck, Blaise!"

"I just want to be clear—"

"Yes, yes! You're the best man!"

"I'm the fucking best man."

"YES. You're the best man!"

He lifts off me, and smiles broadly. "Excellent. Now that that's straightened out, I have a new client to discuss with you."

He goes to sit in my office chair, spinning it in circles until I've collected myself enough to join him at my desk.

~*~

I call a meeting with Potter and Ginny Weasley. Dr. Flanders thinks more memories will help, especially ones that show Hermione with her parents.

Potter is finishing dinner on the stove as we chat. He's quite interested in Dr. Flanders and his techniques, but Ginny Weasley can't stop beaming at me. It's unnerving.

We sit around the small dining table, and I try not to notice all the little touches that scream Hermione here. The books, the pictures, the Muggle things that Ginny Weasley would have no use for.

"So, tomorrow, if your schedules allow?" I ask.

"Absolutely." Potter grins. "This is… It's quite extraordinary, Malfoy. What you've done."

I stand. "I've done nothing. Just… paid someone, really." I take one last look around the flat, and start to take my leave.

"You won't stay for dinner?" Potter asks.

No, not after Blaise's dramatics this afternoon.

"Hermione should be home soon, don't you think?" Ginny grins at me with manic eyes.

I scowl at her.

"I don't want to intrude—"

"Oh, Draco, dear, we're practically *family* now," Weasley says in a gross imitation of my mother's friends. Her eyes sparkle. "Besides, I need to grill you about your intentions."

I swallow. I've never wanted siblings for this exact reason. Too familiar.

"Granger and I have talked," I say, still standing, trying to extricate myself. "And we're… on the same page now. We want the same things."

Potter nods at me, trying to catch up, but Ginny Weasley stands quickly.

"When are you proposing?"

I blink at her. "That's… I think we're a bit early for that—"

"You have it on you don't you," she whispers.

"I have no idea what you're—"

And she's on me. Shoving me into the wall, hands fumbling through my pockets.

"OW! Weasley! What the fuck are you doing?"

Potter is protesting, but this witch grew up with six brothers. I grab for her hands and she slaps me away, digging into a different place in my robes.

"POTTER!" I look to him and he's shrugging at me, helpless. I'm a second away from shoving Ginny Weasley off of my person when she sings.

"Aha!"

And she's holding a golden box, flipping open the lid, and gasping.

She stumbles away from me, staring down at the ring. Potter appears over her shoulder and his eyebrows jump.

"Blimey, Malfoy," Weasley says.

"It's… I'm not doing it tonight. I was just—"

"Oh, yes, you *must* do it tonight." Weasley looks up at me, eyes bright and mischievous.

I shake my head. "No, I… I want to speak with Henry. When he owns his mind again." I look down. "I've spent a lot of time with them, and it's only right that I…"

I trail off, and when I look up, Potter is regarding me with something… something disgusting really. Something like pride or acceptance or friendship and it's awful. I sneer at him like I used to and he smiles at me.

Weasley pushes the ring box into Potter's hands. "Harry, quick. Bake a pot pie. We'll bury the ring in it and all have supper together and—"

"*Excuse* me?" I gasp. "You'll do no such thing."

The locks in the door start to turn, and we toss the ring box between us, running like mice into a casual position at the table. Granger pushes open the door and Weasley is jumping into her arms, congratulating her, while I tuck the ring box back into a pocket, recasting the Notice-Me-Not Charm.

We explain to her that they'll have a session with her parents and Dr. Flanders tomorrow, and her eyes don't leave mine.

Weasley catches on. She makes some excuse for leaving, dragging Potter behind her even as he protests over the dinner still uneaten on the stove.

And now we're alone in her flat. Her… tiny little flat.

"Don't I pay you, Granger? Surely with Weasley's Quidditch salary and your measly income, you can afford an upgrade."

"I like this place," she huffs. "Besides, I'm barely in it."

And I plan to keep it that way. I grin at her and say, "You outed us to the entire office today."

"I did. I really did, didn't I?" She's a bit nervous about it still, so I step in to her, touching her, holding her. "Was there a discussion of what to do with the Love Contract, or will you need to resign."

Oh, she's hilarious. I smile against her lips. She pulls me close.

I try to kiss her. To really kiss her, like I've wanted to, but she pulls away and looks up at me.

"Did you really show my parents your memories?"

I stare at a point over her shoulder, still trying to fight the bricks that snap into place. "A few," I say. "Just about everyone has seen into my mind now, so I thought, what's the difference?"

She smiles, and I kiss her neck, finding her skin just as sweet as I remembered.

"Which memories?"

"Wouldn't you like to know."

I can tell she aches to ask me more. But she just drags her fingers through my hair, and whispers into my ear, "Thank you, Draco. Thank you for bringing them back to me."

I press our hips together, and smile against her skin when I say, "Of course. It was the right thing to do."

She slaps my shoulder, blushing and trying to pull away from me. I'm laughing when I tug her back, pressing her into the hallway wall. She fights me, cursing my name until I press my tongue to hers, and I feel her melt back into me.

My hands slide around her waist, dropping down to hold her backside close to me. She sighs a small moan into my mouth, and I pepper kisses across her jaw until I whisper into her ear, "Show me your bedroom, Granger."

She kisses me quickly, and tugs us down the hall to the door on the left. I drink in as much of her bedroom as I can before I'm shoved to sit on her mattress, her legs climbing over mine and her lips on me again.

I laugh into her, thinking how easily she could have talked me into something slow and sweet today, but this witch is randy.

My hands slide up her sides and back down, rounding over her backside. It sounds like she growls against my lips. I squeeze her, filling my palms with her cheeks and rubbing circles against her dress.

She sighs against my lips, shifting on her knees to press closer to me. Her breasts push into my chest, and her hips open wide to press against mine. Her hands hold my head close to her as she devours me, and my palms slide across her dress, down to her thighs, rounding her knees and back, taking her dress with them.

My cock presses against her, and she rolls forward against it.

How many times have I wanked to this thought. This barest of ideas. Hermione Granger's thighs on either side of mine, her hands threading through my hair.

My hands slide over her thighs, and she mumbles against my lips, "Touch me."

She's wet, dripping through her knickers. I rub her through the fabric and she moans, kissing down my neck, hands sliding to unbutton my robes. My thumb drags against her, slow slides from her entrance to her clit that make her hips vibrate. Once I'm down to my shirt, she starts on her own dress. Buttons down the front pop open, and I watch her greedy fingers as she breathes against my neck.

She shrugs the dress off, sliding it down her shoulders and to the floor behind her. I press a circle on her clit, and she shivers, hands pausing before sliding into my hair again. She attacks my mouth with teeth and tongue, gripping my head to hers, and her hips start rolling back against my hand.

I bring my free hand to her hips, squeezing her as she moans into my mouth.

"Draco, please."

My hand twists until I've pushed aside her knickers, and I slide one finger inside of her. Like coming home after a long day. I release a shaky sigh against her lips, and brush my thumb over her clit in strong quick movements that have her starting to gasp. Her cunt flutters around my finger, and she groans when I add a second.

"Oh, god…"

Her lips parted, eyes squeezed shut, and when I rub my fingers inside of her, and circle my thumb on her clit, I watch as she comes with a shout, holding me inside of her, her face scrunched up.

Her face starts to relax, her eyes drift open to mine, and I say, "You're so beautiful."

I watch her eyes darken, and her teeth bite down on her lip, as she flutters around me again. Not quite an orgasm, but still something pleasurable to her. Something I gave her.

She's catching her breath still when her hands move from gripping my shoulders to the buttons on my shirt. I remove my fingers from her, holding her hips close to me as she kisses

my neck. She opens my shirt, pushing it down my shoulders, leaving it on my elbows for me to finish, and then her hands drop to my buckle.

I smile into her hair.

She shifts on the mattress, giving herself more space to unbutton me, and I close my eyes when she sucks on my neck like I do to her. My cock twitches.

I feel her lifting off me to stand, pulling my trousers down my hips, and I laugh at her eagerness.

The sound is stuck in my throat when I open my eyes. She's sliding down to her knees. Between my legs.

Her hands pull me out of my trunks, and her eyes meet mine before I can even ask, "What are you doing?"

She swallows her nerves and says, "I think I know how. I've read… a few things."

I shake my head, trying to tell her, trying to find the words to make her understand that this will ruin me.

"You don't—"

"—have to," she finishes for me. "I know. I—I want to. "

A fever inches up my chest, burning me as I look down at Hermione Granger, on her knees in front of me, about to suck me off.

And my lips tremble.

She reads me like one of her books, brows furrowing, and says, "Why are you afraid?"

My mouth opens, useless. I can't… explain it. How my mind works. How things had to stay in boxes and how this… *this*… had to be locked away even deeper. I remember the hours Severus spent, extricating *this* from my mind, leaving behind one or two of the more aggressive and purely sexual fantasies.

It would be odd to find no desire for her whatsoever, he'd told me.

"It's a lot," I say, feeling my stomach shaking.

She smiles up at me, and strokes me slowly, softly, and says, "Do you want me to go slow?" A wink. Teasing me a bit, but truly asking.

So, I reach for her face, pressing my fingers into her hair, and say, "I want this. Very much."

She grins. And I watch as she brings her lips to the tip.

I can't breathe. She looks up at me. And her tongue peeks out to lick just the head.

Warm. Wet.

She blinks at me with her wide eyes and asks, "Tell me what you like?"

What do I even like?

"You," my voice tremors, before I can even process a response.

And the slow grin spreading a beautiful blush over her cheeks and down her neck is all I can see behind my closed eyes when she opens her lips and takes me into her mouth.

I gasp, and my fist closes on her hair. I think of sugar quills and soup spoons and swotty voices answering questions before my hand can even shoot into the air.

I grow harder, thicker, twitching inside her mouth. My eyes are screwed up and my fist releases her hair so I don't hurt her, clenching the comforter under me instead.

She slides her mouth on me. Pressure too light, like her hand earlier. Teasing almost. I feel her tongue twitching nervously, trying to figure out its purpose.

"Suck," a dark voice from my throat demands. And when she does, I groan out, my hands covering my face, helpless as she pulls at me.

I'm breathing quickly, feeling my stomach panting, just knowing that she's on her knees, with my cock in her mouth.

And it's like Hermione Granger solved a riddle she's been trying to crack. She takes more of me into her mouth, and sucks, pulling me into her, placing a hand on my thigh and squeezing the base of me with the other. It feels like the pressure will never end, and I moan into my palms, fighting the urge to just thrust into her.

She finally takes a breath, gasping, and before I can tell her she's done well and she can stop now, she descends on me again, sucking and dragging me into her mouth.

"Fuck."

She pulls off me. "Draco."

My fingers part over my eyes and I look down at her, flushed cheeks and swollen lips.

She hides a smirk behind her lips, and says, "Tell me if I'm doing it right?"

I take a deep breath as she dips her head, keeping her eyes on me as her tongue slips out, licking the tip. And then she tilts her head so she can lick my shaft. I groan when her tongue finds the underside of my head, all my nerves shaking in my skin.

She blinks at me, watching my face. Her eyes above a book, her eyes over the ledger at Cornerstone, her eyes across my desk. And she licks over the spot again.

My heels dig into the floor on either side of her, my hips begging to thrust, to fuck her. I'm sweating.

She places her lips around the head of my cock, watching my reaction, and presses her tongue against the underside, rubbing. My hands reach for her, and stop. My fists drop to the bed.

She's too quick of a learner. She watches for pieces to click in the puzzle and then she pushes further. Her tongue runs over and over the head of my cock, and she sucks. Just the head. Soft suction that has my thighs clenching, my balls pulling tight.

My hips jump. Her eyes widen, her tongue sliding along my shaft as I push into her mouth. And before I can apologize she sucks, blinding pressure.

My hand reaches for her. I pull her off of me, grabbing her hair, and dragging her up until I can toss her on the bed.

She breathes into my forehead as I kiss at her chest, pulling off her bra and sucking at her breasts.

I hear myself muttering against her skin.

"…want you to suck me off every morning and every night. Gonna fuck your mouth ten times a day, Granger."

She laughs, gasping, and moaning, her fingers running through my hair as I move aside her knickers, pressing myself to her entrance.

Her nails dig into my back, and I slide in so easily.

"So, good," I mumble. "You'd get an Outstanding in Oral Sex, Granger."

She laughs and says, "So would you—Oh!"

I'm rougher than I've been with her, but she's wet and wrapping herself around me, breathing in my ear such delightful little sounds.

My hips slam into hers, our bones knocking together, and my cock filling her completely. I feel myself cresting, thinking of her mouth on my cock again, thinking of shooting into her mouth—

"Fuck, fuck." And when her back arches, a small groan singing from her lips, I groan, "I love you," into her neck and she shivers, her legs squeezing me, her cunt squeezing me, until she pulses and cries out, her head thrown back against her mattress.

I don't slow down for her. I can't.

And she shakes around me, gasping for air as I thrust against her, pushing our bodies together, until we're blended. My fingers twist into her hair, fisting the curls, burying my face against it, and she might even come again as I pour into her, her walls rolling waves on me,

pulling me deeper and keeping me close. I gasp for air into her curls, our bodies slick and sliding together.

Her hand runs through my hair, and I stay inside of her, resting on top of her until she squirms to push me off.

I stare up at her bedroom ceiling. And she curls against my side, and says, "So you like blow jobs, huh?"

I laugh into the humidity of her room. I'm about to say something about making good on my promise to have her ten times a day, when I take in the decorations of her bedroom.

"Granger," I start, sitting up, turning to look at the wall behind me. "Are you in the middle of redecorating?"

"What?" she breathes. She turns to look.

Her walls… are completely blank. A few nails where pictures used to hang. Those pictures sit in the corner of her room. White walls in every direction.

"You'd think after so many speeches from Monsieur DuBois, you would have learned something about decorating. Like… color."

"Oh," she says, laughing a little. Nervously. "I used to… never mind. I had something up, but I took it down a few months ago." She sits in the middle of her bed in only her knickers. "I haven't gotten around to redecorating."

I stare at her as she looks to one of her walls with tight eyes.

"What was it?"

She looks at me, and blushes. "It was nothing. I just…" She looks away biting her lip.

I turn her face back to mine with a fingertip. "Tell me?"

Her eyes flicker back and forth between mine, and I see her turn redder. She rolls her eyes and stands. "I… had a… Wall."

"A wall?" I ask, watching as she moves to her old Hogwarts chest in the corner of the room.

"Mm-hmm. I just…" She looks at me. "I told you I wanted to know you. I wanted to understand you." I nod at her. "So, I have…" She shakes her head and reaches into the chest, pulling out the picture of us at Fortescue's with Mother. "I saved a few things. And I was trying to piece together a timeline…" She laughs. "It's stupid really."

I stand, slipping my trunks back on and approach her, hoping she won't snap closed the chest before I can see inside.

She bites her lip, and I see newspaper clippings. The same ones that sit in my bottom drawer at home, tucked away under her knickers from the governor's ball and her green silk bra that

she left behind.

I smile, but she thinks I'm teasing her.

"I don't mean to be so strange. It's just… I was trying to figure it out. Trying to follow the events." I look at her. "Your blood on my living room walls. The Auction." My eye twitches, and she reaches up to brush the tension away. "I just wanted to know you."

Her eyes are so bright. And they're all mine. Finally.

I kiss her. I reach for my wand, careful not to disturb the ring in my robes. It's not time for that yet. I send the picture of us at Fortescue's to a place on her blank walls. It sticks. She watches as the rest of her pictures and clippings dance out of her chest and stick to her wall, recreating her timeline.

She watches me curiously. And I smile at her.

I'm ready now.

"Let's start from the beginning," I say. I take her hand.

~*~

Sunday, September 1, 1991

The Hogwarts Express chugs us towards Scotland, and I can't help but examine the passengers overstuffed into this train car.

Blaise Zabini is an odd fellow. He likes to figure out how people tick. Theo Nott is less complicated, and Crabbe and Goyle even less so.

But Pansy Parkinson and Daphne Greengrass should really find their own car. Seven of us in one is just obnoxious.

They're talking nail colors and Witch Weekly and really only Theo is engaging with them. Zabini asks me about my family's vineyards and I don't bloody well know, do I?

The door to the car slams open, and a girl our age looks around, searching the floor for the first few seconds while we wait for her to speak.

She's… broad. Everything about her is wide. Her hair is oddly wild like she'd recently been electrified. Her teeth as she opens her mouth are large. And her eyes as she turns them onto me are wide and dark.

She's… unusual. And clearly not well bred if that's how she shows up to the first day of school, slamming compartments open without introducing herself.

"Has anyone seen a toad?" She turns her eyes on Zabini first. He lifts a brow at her.

And I feel like Zabini and I are still waiting to figure out which of us will lead this pack, so I jump on the opportunity before he can even open his mouth.

"One just stumbled in," I say.

Greengrass laughs. Goyle rumbles next to me. And the girl who takes up too much space turns her wide eyes on me.

I smirk.

She lifts a brow. Unimpressed. There's a fire behind her eyes, blazing to fight with me.

"Charming," she says, looking me over. She turns back to the others, and says, "A boy named Neville has lost his pet toad."

She tells them what compartment Neville is in if the toad is found. She introduces herself to Theo when he reaches out his hand. She frowns at Parkinson when she doesn't bother to introduce herself.

But she doesn't look at me again.

"Are you related to Granger the potioneer?" I ask for some reason.

She looks at me. Her eyes sweeping over my hair before returning to my eyes. "No. My parents are Muggles."

And something extinguishes inside me. Ended before it even burned.

The entire compartment shifts, readjusts, turns their back to her. And she feels it. I watch her lips press together, and her feet shift as she says goodbye, not glancing my way again.

The door snaps closed.

People are supposed to cry. They're supposed to feel an insult hit them and crawl away.

I'm good at insults. I know how this works.

I'm still thinking about fire when the train stops, thinking about how I can make her cry instead of challenge me. What button I needed to press.

When the Sorting Hat places Hermione Granger in Gryffindor, her tie changing colors, it makes sense. She fights like a lion.

And there's something gold about her.

The End.

Chapter End Notes

:)

Much love to all of you for reading this story. Whether you've followed it for a full year, awaiting every (late) chapter, or whether you decided to wait and binge it, or just if you've stumbled here... Thank You. Thank you to those of you who begged for a Draco POV. Thank you to those of you who begged for an Auction fic. My muses.

Let me clarify from my last A/N. The drabbles that I posed on Tumblr WILL be collected into a fic that I will post on FFnet and AO3. You will see the proposal, the wedding, the pregnancy, the children (Lucy and Sebastian). No timeline for that or the Lucissa story. I'm thinking those will be pleasant breaks from Auction angst, so they may be worked on this summer.

As for The Auction: Give me some time to get ahead so I can give you weekly updates. I'm thinking June.

You can find me on Twitter, Tumblr, and Pinterest under LovesBitca8.

End Notes

Find me on Tumblr , Instagram , and Twitter .

Works inspired by this one

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!